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STRICTLY TIED UP.

VOL. III.



STRICTLY TIED UP.

A NOVEL.

'In many shapes the powers mould human things;
In varying notes God's world-wide edict rings,
Of elements unhoped for blended.
Fruition long assured is dashed at last;
The dark cause wins, when heaven the lot hath cast;
And so this tangled matter ended.'—EURIPIDES.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. III.



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CONTENTS

TO

THE THIRD VOLUME.

CHAPTER	PAGE
I. A FOOL'S PARADISE	1
II. DISILLUSIONED	27
III. DISCARDED	47
IV. THE REVISING BARRISTER	59
V. THE WOES OF TASTE	80
VI. DETENTION	94
VII. ADAM'S WEATHER-GLASS	113
VIII. LEGATUS NATUS	136
IX. CONSEQUENT ARRANGEMENTS	155
X. ONLY TWO LETTERS	172
XI. CLEARED UP	197

CHAPTER	PAGE
XII. UNMASKED	221
XIII. THE MIGHTY FALLEN	240
XIV. GREAT GRIMSBY AT LAST	259
XV. RIGHTED	271

STRICTLY TIED UP.

CHAPTER I.

A FOOL'S PARADISE.

FOR a few days after she had sent her unfortunate letter to her daughter, Lucy lived on in a fool's paradise of contentment at her own charitable cleverness. So she wondered when the reply would come, and whether the Baronet's visit would soon follow on Meriel's return.

At last Featherston's groom came cantering over on a steaming hunter with a

note, in which the good gentleman informed his little treasure that he was suffering under the unusual infliction of a visitor in the shape of a cousin from town, and prayed her to take pity and allow him to bring Colonel Mordaunt over and show him Yaxley. ‘Of course,’ she sped the answer back; ‘come to-morrow, both of you; at least dine and sleep, if you will not stop longer.’ So charged, the gentlemen came, and Mrs. Foulis found that the Colonel was an amusing rattle, who had something to say about everybody in London, and would not be baulked of his gossip. It would have been a manifest *laches* in Lucy to have neglected such an opportunity of picking up the information for which she was

yearning ; so she took a politic occasion of dropping this question :—

‘ My daughter tells me she has been meeting an agreeable Sir Miles Brandreth ; have you ever heard of him ? ’

‘ Brandreth ! I should just think so. And all London too ! Most unscrupulous dodger in England ! and so confoundedly cunning ! No fellow can catch him out. But his son is a trump ; he’s one of my greatest chums. Nobody can understand how such a fellow can have such a son ; and it is a crying shame that his son’s good example don’t teach the old scoundrel better. There is Eustace, the jolliest fellow living, slaving away for his bread as a lawyer, and writing for the papers, while his father is making and spending

fortunes by his swindling and his extravagance ! Foulisville could tell you a thing or two about him, if he dared. Why, Skillicome came to the "Phly" only two days ago, full of a letter he had got from old Brandreth, very cock-a-whoop at having caught a rich girl by pretending he had saved her from drowning, and ——' Here something in Lucy's eye made him wind up with—'a deal more nonsense, which I don't believe.'

Featherston—who was, to say the truth, considerably bored by his cousin's incessant torrent of talk about men, women, and things, of which he knew little and cared less—was puzzling over the newspaper, and neither listened to the words nor scanned the looks of his companions.

Mrs. Foulis abruptly found out she really did not know it was so late, and moved off to bed, merely remarking to her guardian that he knew where the smoking-room was, and that she hoped he and his cousin would stay there as long as they liked. Mordaunt had found out by Lucy's look and quick departure that the conversation had taken an awkward turn, and a little thinking led him to appreciate that the coincidence of the heiress of Yaxley meeting and liking Brandreth, and of Brandreth's own story of catching a rich girl, involved something more behind, which stamped the Colonel an ass for letting his tongue so incontinently wag. However, to his great relief, he discovered that Featherston had heard nothing, so he judged it most

prudent to stifle the claims of his abundant curiosity, to keep his own counsel, and to forego the coveted cigar.

Lucy had never recollected for many years having spent so wretched a night. Thinking and tossing, tossing and thinking, consumed the dreary hours. Had she, then, in her vain folly and self-sufficiency, sacrificed her only daughter, her own peace of mind and respectability, and the magnificent inheritance of her father, which she held, strictly tied up, as a trust for that daughter, to an adventurer and a scoundrel ? Charity demanded the utmost abatements to be made in the off-hand assertions of a chatterbox such as Featherston's cousin clearly was ; but, after all deductions, the ugly fact remained that a man who was

neither badly principled, as far as Lucy could judge, nor ill-tempered, had so little hesitation in summing up in colours so dark the reputation of a man whom she had gone so far in accepting as her son-in-law. She never could forgive herself, she thought, for such imprudence. Sir Miles talked of coming to Yaxley, and that had thrown her off her guard. But if he really was the cunning and unscrupulous dodger whom Mordaunt described, how could she depend upon any professions of his, and, what was possibly worse, how could she depend upon herself hereafter ? Her dreadful life-long solitude recurred to her, and she could not hold herself guiltless for acting with a self-reliance which only intimate converse with the world could have justified.

Her old evening's musings now rose as pictures, and she asked herself why she had never done her duty to her position by making the plunge and bringing men of intellect and experience to her side. Here she was, as great a child as her daughter, having to confront a cunning and audacious man of the world, and not even her own lawyer her friend ! Brandreth would see through her in a moment, as he had seen through Meriel.

Then she would ask herself what evidence there was to support Mordaunt's confident assertions ; and the reply was crushing. There were no means of explaining away that dreadful letter which Colonel Mordaunt overheard somebody read at the club, except to suppose he had told

a deliberate falsehood, if not of jumping at an impossible coincidence. How was Mordaunt or his friend to have conceived so improbable an incident as that of the old gentleman saving a girl from drowning ? How could she disbelieve such positive evidence ? She struggled hard, but it was too much for her. Sir Miles's exertions in saving her daughter's life were his one claim—ostentatiously put forward—upon the regard both of herself and of her daughter, and here he was himself detected as coarsely boasting of that obligation as only a pretence for getting possession of the girl. Could it, she asked herself again, have been an invention of Colonel Mordaunt ; for Sir Miles was clearly unpopular ? Yet, as she again answered herself, how was he to have

heard of the adventure on the lake? Besides, it was most unlikely that a gentleman,—the cousin, too, of her old guardian, and so a distant connection of her own, a gallant officer, distinguished in the Crimean War, of whom she had often heard, though she had never met him before,—would dare to utter a falsehood which was sure of speedy detection. Yet the other story would involve an equal falsehood on Brandreth's part. There was this difference, however, as she was forced to admit, between the two suppositions: Sir Miles's falsehood had the acquisition of Meriel's fortune as a motive, while that of Colonel Mordaunt would be purposeless malice. Besides, she knew about one of the men, and she was quite ignorant about the other.

Then another thought, which made her almost sick, darted in with lurid distinctness. Never in her life had she kept any important secret from Featherston till now, and she had failed in telling him of Meriel's letter. Would he ever forgive this breach of confidence? Yet this reflection led her to a conclusion. There would be time in the morning to detain her old guardian; she would send a message to him not to go till he had seen her. He was not cunning, but he was loyal, true, and high-principled; and his acquaintance with Mordaunt would enable him to say whether, considering his cousin's personal acquaintance with the Baronet, it would be wise to bring him into counsel. Once closeted with him, she

felt sure of her influence with him to make him appreciate her present trust in him, and so think lightly of her previous reticence. Her plea should be that she had been thinking too exclusively of the secrecy which a daughter had the right to expect from her mother. She had been too delicate towards an unworthy child, for fear that child might hereafter turn upon her and allege her mother's breach of confidence for any act of undutiful retaliation. Featherston was a bachelor, and he must allow a parent to be the judge of feelings of which he never had had any personal experience. There would, of course, be but one thing which could now be thought of—to put an end to the possi-

bility of any engagement as quickly and as completely as possible. She refused, as things turned out, in her vain snatches at sustaining straws, to face Meriel's letter as involving anything like a settled project of marriage, and yet she was for practically treating the complication as the most entangling of engagements. But what was to be the machinery ? A telegram was the quickest, but—as Lucy, in her old-fashioned way, thought—not the safest communication ; besides which, it was not at all likely that, with the inexperienced girl in the power of that bad, dangerous man, she would obey a telegram. A letter was slower, but safer ; but safest of all would be some human messenger, who could insist and persist.

Who should it be? Featherston? But Featherston had never crossed the sea, so he often boasted; and she feared both his temper, if Brandreth—no doubt an expert duellist—were to call him out, and his kind-heartedness if Meriel should cry. Englishwoman as she was to the backbone and well read in Sir Jonah Barrington, she fancied that the duel must still survive as a living thing in barbarous Ireland along with landlord shooting, and being a stranger to Sir Miles she never had had any occasion to realise his aversion to gunpowder.

As she rolled and tossed, all at once her mental fog rose, and she beheld her duty with absolute clearness, which left her in amazement at the time which she

had taken in reaching her conclusion. How could she be beating about the bush so long, when all along the only possible course was so plain ? Here she was, thirty-four in years, twenty-four in constitution, as strong as a horse, and though a big fool, as she now esteemed herself, resolute and fearless when once her pluck was up.

She would go herself, carry off Meriel, and, if need be, punch Brandreth's head. Anyhow, though, she would tell all to the dear old man.

Having reached this conclusion, she dozed away from sheer exhaustion, and was, after an hour or two of restless sleep, awakened by her maid bringing her morning tea and letters. One was in a very

familiar hand, and she tore it open to read :—

‘ *Bray, near Dublin,*

‘ —— 18 —.

‘ **MY DEAREST DEAR MOTHER,**

‘ My darling Miles was overjoyed at your approbation, and we agreed we could not too soon do what you had so lovingly sanctioned. We are man and wife, and I am longing to bring my husband to obey your summons to Yaxley. You will love him I know, for you said your heart would warm to him with gratitude for me. Mine has done so, and I rejoice that in loving him I am obeying my darling Mater.

‘ Your most affectionate child,

‘ **MERIEL BRANDRETH.**

A violent ringing of the bell startled the servants at their breakfast, and Mrs. Foulis's maid ran up with unwonted activity. Lucy was sitting up in bed, staring round with an expression of agony such as the girl had never before witnessed on her face. She collected herself as the maid entered the room, and bade her have the gentlemen informed, with her kind regards and sincere regrets, that, owing to a sick headache which had come on during the night, she was unable to dress and wish them good-bye. So she lay musing over the inevitable; and it was not till near mid-day that she rose and placed herself at the writing-desk which stood in her bedroom.

Meriel's declaration that Brandreth and

VOL. III.

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12

she were man and wife was assurance enough to Lucy of the fact. Disillusioned as she was as to Sir Miles's estimate of truthfulness, such a statement as this must stand upon the basis of fact. There might be a dispute over the share a man had in saving the girl who was his partner in a common accident, but marriage was a public action before the world, and witnesses must be forthcoming. Mrs. Foulis, with a woman's feelings, never turned her thoughts to legal questions dealing with considerations of which she was to a fault ignorant and regardless. Her daughter, it seemed, was living with Brandreth as his wife, and they declared that there had been a marriage between them. A marriage, to Lucy, was a mar-

riage. She knew nothing of Irish peculiarities as to such things.

A daring solicitor from the Liffey would very possibly have urged upon her that it might still be quite possible, if means could be taken, to bring the legality of the ceremony to trial. If Mrs. Foulis, in tears, but not disfigured by crying, could be put into the box, it was conceivable that a Dublin jury, directed by a susceptible judge, might be induced by the influence of a witness so comely and so attractive to declare the ill-starred union illegal. This was, however, a contingency which never for an instant presented itself to her. Not for a single instant did she contemplate a course in which her own victory would have been

fatal to the reputation of her child, whom she would thereby reduce to a discarded wife, if not also mother; and in which victory was not quite sure for her side, with Meriel opposed to her, only seventeen years old, and the susceptibilities on which she had to depend so uncertain, when she was herself at best a matter-of-fact Englishwoman.

All that was left to her was to weep and bear the blow; so she sat down, and with as much speed as was consistent with repeated bursts of hysterical crying, composed the answer to her misguided daughter.

The letter was incoherent in construction, but it spoke with all the eloquence of deeply lacerated feeling, and the calm logic

of a right cause. It passed from sorrow to indignation as it exposed the flimsy and palpably hypocritical misinterpretation of the invitation which she had, at his own instance, given to the man to come to Yaxley, and be looked at ; and it melted again into tenderness as it pointed out to the unhappy, misguided girl the misery which she had laid up in store for her later years in yoking her life to one so sure to use her for his own selfish ends, and if he did not fling her away when she was no longer useful, only tolerate her for her money's value :—

‘Was it not enough in one family’ (she pleaded) ‘to have had the daughter and heiress of the house throw herself away in

her earliest immature womanhood by a wretched marriage with a plausible fortune-hunter? Why would my daughter emulate her foolish mother in the one unhappy act of her life, which ought to have been her child's warning; because my excuse, such as it was, was this, that my infatuated aunt, the only woman whom I ever knew as filling for me the place of a mother, coaxed, bullied, and coerced me into taking Captain Foulis? I have never been so cruel to you, dearest Meriel. I have always urged on you the greatest circumspection in making your irrevocable choice, not sparing to blame myself to you, and humble myself before my own child, for your own good. I have never even seen Sir Miles Brandreth, and it is impos-

sible to suppose that you and he did not very well understand my letter, though it may have suited him to misread it, and to pervert your understanding of it. He knew that I could only have intended it to convey an invitation to him to come to Yaxley, before matters had gone any further. The ability which you tell me he possesses contradicts the supposition that he could have mistaken my meaning; and I am, therefore, left with that estimate of his character which I forbear to give you, because, unhappily, he is your husband. I see much to excuse in the stupid pliability with which you accepted his ingenuous misreading of my expressions; but I can find no excuse for the want of confidence, I must add the duplicity, you have

shown to your unhappy mother, whose every thought and action have always been for your happiness.'

The composition of this appeal was the safety-valve of Mrs. Foulis's excited feelings. The pretence of sitting at a luncheon at which she hardly touched a morsel, and a canter on her pony, brought back an appearance of external calm; and for the letter to Lady Foulisville, which Lucy conceived herself bound to write, in ignorance of the illness which had incapacitated her sister-in-law, she sat down, not at the desk in her bedroom, but at the table in the Library. To those who knew Mrs. Foulis's domestic ways this difference would have been significant. This

missive was as concise and balanced in its composition as it was temperate in its tone. She dwelt upon the confidence which she had shown in a sister-in-law, with whom personally she had had small acquaintance, and of whose country life she was quite ignorant, in leaving to her, at her own request, what was really nothing less than the responsibility of introducing into the world her own only daughter, at a considerably younger age than that at which she had intended Meriel to have come out, or would have allowed her to do, but for this invitation. She appealed to Lady Foulisville's own sense of justice to say whether she had not put herself under very sacred obligation, not merely in accepting, but in soli-

citing, this charge ; and she invited her as a mother to answer for it before God, her own conscience, and her heart-broken correspondent and sister, as to the manner in which she had fulfilled that trust.

Little did Lucy think that these words, just and temperate as they were, and well deserved if the case had been that which was present to her mind, were really addressed to an invalid, tossing on the sick-bed, vibrating between life and death, and totally unconscious of the grim comedy which had been enacted under her roof.

CHAPTER II.

DISILLUSIONED.

DURING the earlier period of Delicia's illness Miss Robbins took upon herself to open and answer all her patroness's letters. Some she wrote in her own name, dwelling on the incapacity of the patient in colours as strong as the fact, and in others she manufactured plausible directions from 'my beloved and honoured chief.' She saw the inconsistency, and was amused at it, as it was evidence to herself of her own powers. Had Lucy's letter

arrived during this time, it would no doubt have been answered in the second form and then destroyed ; and as Robbins would probably have found it convenient to have forgotten all about it when the Countess got well, and asked about her letters, a crop of complications not less perplexing than those which really occurred might have resulted.

But at last even Miss Robbins's tough constitution began to give way under the incessant strain of a nursing which was the more trying because bestowed from selfishness, not love ; and a sharp bilious attack compelled her to keep her bed for some days. Just at this time, somewhat unexpectedly, Lady Foulisville's malady took a favourable turn, and when Robbins was

next able to glide into her room, she found that the doctor had allowed the Countess to sit up, eat a little chicken, potter over the newspaper, and open her own letters. Still she was weak, nervous, and excitable, susceptible about the incidents of her sick-room, sometimes inquisitive, for a few moments, with febrile suspicion, but more generally apathetic as to the whole world beyond. With difficulty, the diplomatist induced Lord Foulisville to pay his wife a short visit, and she hardly noticed him when he came in. She was told that all the company had left, and she took that as a matter of course, not seeming to discriminate between them, or to care for one person more than another. Robbins's spirits rose as she opined that the craze of

adoption had passed off, and that when it should suit her to tell, in her own way, the strange news of a match between Brandreth and Meriel, Delicia would take it with the same unconcern with which she now received intelligence of her various acquaintances.

Convalescent as Robbins was, she was still very weak, and entered Lady Foulisville's room at uncertain hours, sometimes before and sometimes after the arrival of the post. It happened to be on one of her worse mornings that Lucy's letter reached Fontarabia, and schooled as the French maid had been by Robbins to keep back suspicious correspondence, this particular epistle, in a ladylike but not remarkable hand, had failed to attract her attention.

Robbins had shown her the handwriting of Meriel, Brandreth, Sant' Onofrio, and one or two others, and warned her to keep these back for her own delivery, but she had no manuscript of Lucy's to show, and, indeed, had never thought of her writing. So Lucy's letter, just as it was—a remonstrance, terrible in its calm truthfulness, if written to one really privy to Brandreth's villainy—reached the poor, nervous, trembling, excitable invalid, hardly yet in possession of her full consciousness or responsibility of word and action, with the hideous tale which it unfolded, of the outrage against honour, truth, and decorum, perpetrated under Lady Foulisville's own roof, in the case of her own niece, responsibility for whom she had officiously, un-

necessarily, and inconsiderately assumed. The perusal of this appeal stimulated the awakening faculties without bracing in proportion the nervous powers. Lady Foulisville took it all in perhaps more keenly than she would have done in her natural health ; she was white with rage, and trembling with humiliation. The old spirit lived in her, and she was again Delicia Driscoll ; while Lucy, as she appeared in her weeds at Meriel's christening, rose clear before her eyes, and scathed her with mortification. Her pride, her honour, her last forlorn hopes of an adopted daughter, were all crushed ; and knowing all that she did, the sickening conviction intruded itself that it involved the connivance and the duplicity of her trusted companion.

Robbins, at the moment, swam in with her stereotyped ‘What letters this morning, dearest Delicia?’

The Countess, not caring to look up, tossed Mrs. Foulis’s communication at her breast, and positively shrieked, ‘What do you think of that?’

Robbins, with consummate calmness, read it all, folded it up, returned it, and then replied, ‘I think she has got hold of some strange version of the affair.’

‘Strange version! And what affair? You shameless woman! Can you deny before God and before me that you hadn’t a hand in it? If you hadn’t, and as you value your soul at the Day of Judgment, why have you kept me blind? You told me the fellow had gone, and the girl

too. Why did you hide their being married ?'

‘A hand in it, my dearest Delicia !’

‘Don’t Delicia me ; answer, as you are an honest woman, had you a hand in it ?’

Miss Robbins had not calculated on the excess of nervous excitability, consequent on the fever, resulting as it did in the temporary development of a passion which simulated moral courage. She played with the demand as she would have done with one of the old tiffs in Eaton Place.

Lady Foulisville, shattered as she was by her illness, and no longer mistress of herself, gave vent to all that deep reserve of genuine Munster nature which had for so many years been kept under by the restraint of artificial gentility—a burning

lump of turf hidden under a coronet—and she let fly at the unprepared Robbins with a volley of abuse, recrimination, objurgation, and, if we must tell the real truth, highly-seasoned words, more fit for Ballinasloe than Belgravia, barbing sneers such as can only be dropped from the elevation of a prosperous worldly position, upon a baffled and exposed subordinate.

Delicia knew she was a countess, and Robbins a confidante, and she made Robbins feel it to her very marrow. If Lady Foulisville had only had the self-restraint to have been short as well as strong, she might have come off conqueror, but she ran on so long, and repeated herself so often, that she handed the advantage over to her adversary, who checked her rising choler

with a magnificent effort ; and as during the remaining strife, while Lady Foulisville herself burned with real rage, the passion of the confidante was only clever acting, Robbins naturally obtained the advantage in the contest. The insults of the irate lady might have ruffled a far sweeter temper than hers, but she took good care not to be disconcerted, and yet to sustain the part of a provoked and indignant gentlewoman. This was the supreme crisis of her career. Her eyes were opened to the gravity of the incident, and she had to make her choice in a moment ; but a moment was sufficient for her. Her calculations for the future, indeed, miscarried, but they were sufficiently plausible to entitle her

to the praise of being a consummate strategist. Lady Foulisville—with her social failure, her stupid old house in the wilderness, the ambiguous condition of his Lordship's fortune, and her own shattered and doubtful health—was, so Miss Robbins believed, a sucked orange. To become the indispensable friend and adviser of the young heiress of delightful Yaxley, with its improving collieries, was to step, she thought, into a new, more powerful, more brilliant future. Sir Miles, she was sure, would square it with his mother-in-law, while she herself, so she fancied, had it in her power to expose him if he did not keep his promise.

She acted accordingly. Poor, feeble Lady Foulisville fell into a chair, abso-

lutely collapsing with the effort of such a burst of passion. A few of the old fondling words, some pity for her really invalid condition and evident suffering, might have lulled the sudden storm. Miss Robbins willed the contrary, in the conviction that a present reconciliation with the Countess would embarrass her new great game, on which she was bending all her energies. Let her go forth, she thought, driven out, as she would represent, for standing up for Meriel and Sir Miles, and these could hardly refuse to take her by the hand, and make up sevenfold for what she had lost in their cause. So she drew herself up, and met the vituperations of Lady Foulisville with sarcasm, so cutting, because elaborated in

cold blood, as to leave an incurable sore. At the same time, like a prudent general, she covered her retreat. Ill words, even from Lady Foulisville, might be prejudicial to her prospects, while an explanation between the Countess and Lucy would be fatal.

Miss Robbins, knowing that she could no longer rule by love, resolved on doing so by fear ; so, with that look habitual to her when addressing persons of a lower social station, she answered, ‘Very well, my lady ; you are pleased to discard your faithful friend, who would have sacrificed her life for you, because she has committed one error of judgment, as you are pleased to consider, and as perhaps, in the eyes of worldlings, it may be.

Good! but please, my lady, have a care what you say of me, or how you represent my conduct to others. In Ireland, as well as in England, the most humble is sure of justice, even against the brother of Augustus Foulis and the patroness of Sir Miles Brandreth.'

Miss Robbins had calculated correctly on the cowardice of her former friend, and her shot took effect. Lady Foulisville was no great lawyer, so her dread of the consequences of an action for slander was excessive; and, even if she could be spared such a calamity, she knew how much she was at the mercy of her 'dear' Robbins. A woman of her character could not have lived in the intimacy of such a toady without having

stripped her moral nature bare before her, and endowed her with infinite means of retailing and exaggerating every petty motive and mean or sly action of her patroness. No doubt, in Lady Foulisville's inward estimate of her own character much would have been extenuated which, in the hands of even friendly critics, would have appeared indefensible. Still, even she—a woman whose conscience never was of a fine fibre—had ugly suspicions of what the world would think of her in connexion with the Brandreth affair, as to which she could hardly prove herself guiltless, without leaving it in her enemies' power to say she had been blind and stupid.

The upshot of all was to drive her

from the most straightforward and praiseworthy resolution which she had ever conceived since the day on which she first heard herself addressed as 'My lady.' She had intended to have written a full and clear explanation to Lucy as to a near relation who had the right to be satisfied on a matter of such interest and importance. She would have explained the accident, and dwelt on its unfortunate result in having so long incapacitated her, owing to the dangerous illness which supervened, from even knowing what was going on; she would have dwelt on the unjustifiable marriage having been forced on while she was in a condition of incapacity through the deplorable intervention of one of whose

sense and good feeling she had thought better; and she would have asked Lucy to forget and forgive.

Terrorised by the cunning insolence of Robbins, and with the fear of slander before her eyes, Delicia shrank into a bewildered, cowering, weak woman. She was not the least softened towards the detected hypocrite. Rather, she hated her the more from feeling that she herself was being played with and humiliated by the upstart Robbins. But as she hated, so did she also fear; and fear was the ruling impulse. Not to mix up Robbins with the business in answering Lucy was, she thought, her indispensable precaution. But she could only not mix up Robbins by herself swaggering through

her letter. So, instead of the excellent statement on which she had resolved, she penned a short, stiff, clumsy, arrogant missive, as unreasonably haughty in its language as it was grovelling in the spirit which prompted it—asserting, with no corroborative evidence, her own innocence in the whole affair, and blaming, with an asperity due to her own insufficient knowledge of the value of words, Mrs. Foulis's suspicions that she could have played so unworthy a part.

After every excuse is made for Lady Foulisville's ill-health and shattered nerves, it must be owned, not only that she was acting very wrongly, but that she was conscious of her own misdeed. She was intentionally behaving in a very cowardly

manner, when she had so nearly trodden with courage the right way; but she trumped up an excuse in that very cowardice of her nature, and told herself that because she was so weak, she felt herself constrained to do that which was wrong; and all the while she excused herself for what she was doing on the score of that very illness as to which she took care to keep Lucy in the dark. In short, she acted again—though the circumstances were more solemn, and the results more disastrous—as when she broke up her parties to punish Sir Miles for an offence the knowledge of which she all the time laboured to keep from those who suffered from her caprice. Then, to be sure, she only did a foolish

thing to satiate a righteous indignation ; now she was consciously doing a wrong to avoid denouncing an outrage which, in her eyes, was crying before Heaven for vengeance. She knew that what she was doing must provoke a quarrel with Lucy,—perhaps the only person in the world for whom she still felt any lingering respect,—but she flattered herself with the miserable illusion that she would find means some day of making it up and explaining all, when Robbins was well out of the way. So she achieved another failure, worse than all her failures in fashionable life—the failure of self-respect.

CHAPTER III.

DISCARDED.

WRITING her letter to Lucy, without the assistance on which she had learned habitually to lean, was to Lady Foulisville, in her prostrate condition, a lengthy and fatiguing task. So the morning was far spent before she had completed it. To Miss Robbins the time was like weeks, as she awaited the Countess's summons. In silence, and on tiptoe, she entered the sick room, at the

sound of the summoning bell, and strove by a hasty glance to ascertain the character of her patroness's feelings. She had had time to cool and to think, and the advantages of her bold policy no longer seemed incontestable to her. Still, she had gone so far, that, unassisted, retreat was quite impossible. She believed that the breach was, as she had so lately intended it to be, irreparable. At the same time she was graciously prepared to accord her pardon to the repentant Countess, in case the great lady should duly humble herself at the feet of the confidante. She had, indeed, gone so far as to settle, in her own mind, the pecuniary and residential conditions of a reconciliation. Even the words in which she was

to accept it had been conned over and framed in her mind. But no opening was vouchsafed to the discomfited schemer. Lady Foulisville, still quivering with excitement, indicated silence by a deprecatory gesture, and signed to her to sit down. Then she cleared up—speaking in short, cold terms—an account which had long been running between them, and gave Miss Robbins 50*l.*, nominally as a slight memorial of a friendship unhappily interrupted, but not quenched. Her pride forbade her to say that this was really intended as hush-money, while no honourable feeling stood in the way of the recipient clutching what was to her the wages of treachery. She felt that it was incumbent on

her to say something, and she began, 'If a life's devotion, Lady Foulisville,'—when she was interrupted by a feeble cry, and, looking round, she saw that the Countess had fainted. The maid was near at hand to take charge of the invalid, and Miss Robbins stepped out. Nevermore in this life had the two women speech or sight of each other.

So did Lady Foulisville part with her once-beloved Robbins, baffled in all her projects of greed and ambition—an exile from Eaton Place and Fontarabia, and a stranger, as it turned out, to Yaxley. The woman made her way to London, and then wrote without delay a joint letter to Sir Miles and Lady Brandreth, but she received no reply. The fifty pounds were

soon dissipated in clearing small debts, and Miss Robbins shivered in her cold autumnal lodging, more destitute and more desperate than upon that memorable morning when she spent an amount which she could ill spare of her hard-earned pittance in making herself tidy to present to Lady Foulisville that sonnet from 'one who had long observed and admired her from her unknown retreat,' which first procured for her an entrance into the house in Eaton Place. In her distress the desperate woman actually took a step from which, under less urgent circumstances, the vanity which she mistook for pride would have made her revolt, and she wrote a beseeching letter craving for an interview with Sant' Onofrio. Her

request was at once granted, and the place named was some coffee-house in the neighbourhood of Holborn.

The man had preceded his suppliant, and was quietly smoking a cigar when Miss Robbins entered. The jaunty familiarity with which he nodded to her, and muttered between two puffs, 'Sit down as we used to do in the jolly old times,' considerably disconcerted Miss Robbins. But a little fanning with her handkerchief enabled her to collect her thoughts, and as she had schooled herself well in the part which she intended to play, she began, in somewhat stilted but well-chosen English, to objurgate the faithless man for his cruel demeanour at Fontarabia. But she was not well through her first sentence before

she found a material obstacle placed upon her oratory in the shape of the big brown hand of the Irishman placed upon her mouth, and accompanied by a furtive kiss on her cheek, as he whispered quite prettily,—

‘ Well, my dear, and did not you see why ? There were lions in the way, and spies in every cranny. Brandreth, bad luck to him ! was bent on unearthing me. Now we are free, my love ; and I am here again, your own true cavalier to command.’

Robbins, astonished and overjoyed at so unexpected a confession, poured out a voluble tale of a very different kind from that which she had been purposing. With all her crafty selfishness there was

a womanly fibre in her nature, and the schemer had galvanised it. The Count waited till she had done; then, drawing her close to himself, whispered in a very subdued tone,—

‘There’s wealth before us — untold wealth! A mad old girl—Baroness von Presterkranz—living at Prague, believes she can make her fortune on the English turf, and she trusts your humble servant and some other friends to make it for her. She has given out she is coming to England, when she has no more idea of leaving Bohemia than I of going to Paradise. Anyhow, she is wanted and expected somewhere to-morrow, and, with my dear beauty’s magnificent knowledge of foreign languages, I cannot conceive

a more efficient deputy Baroness than a certain fair lady. And perhaps before you went you would make me the proud possessor of your autograph on these few scraps of paper—“*Amalia von Presterkranz*”?

Robbins was an adventuress, alike mendacious and unscrupulous, but she was, upon calculation, an adventuress within the limits of the law. She would cringe, she would fawn, she would equivocate, and she would lie. An open letter to her was common property, and a keyhole an acoustic instrument of rare capacity. But forge or personate! No, never! It was wicked; so, too, was listening at a keyhole. But it was something more—it was dangerous, and pos-

sibly disastrous—that was a very serious consideration. Wherever she might go, she was determined that the Old Bailey should not be one of the places.

For one instant she vacillated, for the temptation was very strong—not of wealth easily earned by the daring confederate and shared with him, but of the society of that confederate. The mine which love sprung in her nature had been so unexpected that it was almost successful. But the vacillation was only momentary. The spirit which had captured and thrown over Lady Foulisville, and met Brandreth on equal terms, reasserted itself. The voice was firm, though sorrowful, with which she answered 'Never.'

Saying no more, she rose and

walked away—a monument of rigid, tearless despair—her latest of love-dreams shattered and dispersed. The unfortunate creature is, so it is said, still alive, in much destitution, hardly scraping together a miserable livelihood as a daily governess in a large provincial town.

Mrs. Foulis interpreted Lady Foulisville's answer as any other straightforward person would have taken such a communication. It left no doubt in her mind that her treacherous sister-in-law had really been privy to the designs of Sir Miles, and swaggered because she could not deny. Self-respect and her placable indisposition to prolong strife made her abstain from offering any answer, though not to answer was, as she well knew to

renounce all future intimacy with her sister-in-law. It was a great grief to her to have to drop that one near relation with whom, though faintly and intermittently, she had always kept up friendly intercourse, but her duty bade her make the sacrifice, and she imagined that the last letters between herself and Lady Foulisville would now have passed.

CHAPTER IV.

THE REVISING BARRISTER.

THIS disreputable father has usurped so much of our attention since he forced himself upon the party at Fontarabia, that we have strayed away from the proceedings of Eustace Brandreth. Fortune had her gifts in store for him as well as for Sir Miles this summer. As the older man got a wife, so the younger one, to his great delight, found that craving for public occupation which is apt to come

upon a barrister of ten years' standing, gratified by a revising barristership, where the work promised to be exciting and amusing, from the certainty of a sharp fight at the coming general election which would, in several counties and in still more boroughs, be much affected by the state of the register. The young lawyer had decided politics of his own, but he had the good fortune, rather than the prudence, to have kept his occasional connexion with party newspapers rather dark while his reputation as a society writer in magazines was well known. Had the case been otherwise it is probable that he would not have obtained his present position from the hands which bestowed it.

His father who had not heard of this

stroke of luck did him the honour of announcing his marriage in a letter of elaborate irony, summing up every particular of the incident in language of old-world courtesy so framed as to sting his son at each point where the cunning writer thought him most vulnerable ; and concluding with the gratuitous falsehood that, in all probability, he never should have thought of domestic felicity in a second marriage if the offspring of his first alliance had studied to make his home bright and cheerful. In that case, he said, his search after an heiress might have been directed to the advantage of his successor, who had only lost the chance of meeting Miss Foulis at Fontarabia by his unkindly absenting him-

self from the paternal hearth at the time when the invitation arrived. ‘It is,’ the wily cynic added, ‘the catsup in my rich portion of turtle, as I coo to my own sweet turtle, Meriel, to think she might have fallen to the lot of one who is not yet double her own age by an entire year. But she is very kind indeed to her poor old husband, and she often promises me that when I am gone she will, for my sake, not forget my learned but truant boy.’

Eustace was deeply ashamed at his father’s escapade, which his scrupulous nature painted in its darkest colours. He was conscious of being wholly guiltless, yet he had not sufficient faith in the justice of the world to be sure that the verdict

of society might not be that the son of such a father must certainly be the object of a suspicion against which he had no right to complain, for his conscience pricked him with the recollection of several occasions when he had himself done a similar injustice to his neighbour. Still, his new step-mother was a reputable woman—girl rather,—and it was needful, so as not to lavish the small stock of respectability still left to the family, to keep alive the knowledge of that fact, which otherwise might easily have been disputed. As to her mother, all that he had heard of Mrs. Foulis was that she had been quite out of the affair, and, indeed, highly disapproved of it, although, for motives similar to his own feelings, she had offered

condonation. Balancing all things, then, he wrote a coldly civil reply, in the key of his father's own letter, congratulating Sir Miles on having found in a closer tie that domestic felicity which he had himself been unable to minister, and trusting that he might have the honour of making Lady Brandreth's acquaintance. Work comes to a man in Eustace's frame of mind like a sweet balm, and when, as in his case, it reaches him accompanied by pay, it is indeed twice blessed. For a few days after his appointment shadowy forms in ermine and full-bottomed wigs danced round the elated junior's chambers. Journalism was Bohemian, and light literature a flimsy nothing. He was still in the glow, though perhaps the cooling glow

of his new professional ambition, when he entered upon the discharge of his somewhat tiresome duties.

One day, with some amusement, but more perplexity, he found himself seated on the tribunal, a lumpy old arm-chair, in a stuffy inn parlour, with the agents round him, very much on the *qui vive* over the claim of a tenant farmer whose case had elements of perplexity about it which were likely to reappear in a good many more, so that the decision in this case might not improbably turn the scale at the coming election, besides being pretty certain to come in the interim before the Court of Common Pleas. It was a case which the newspapers would get hold of, and which would make or

mar Eustace's reputation for legal acumen and judicial impartiality. He would not only have to decide, but to give his reasons for the decision. So in order to gain a little time, he inquired of the puzzled - headed hero of the embittered fight,—‘Where do you live, sir?’

‘At Yaxley; I hold under Madam Foulis.’

‘Yaxley, indeed! Is Yaxley in these parts?’

‘Think it was, sir,’ replied the farmer, proud to know one thing, at all events, of which the barrister was ignorant.
‘Four miles off; leastways, if——’

‘Silence, man! What has the distance of Yaxley to do with your vote? What were you saying, Mr. Pounceby?’

Mr. Pounceby, to the intense relief of the Revising Barrister, charged into the enemy's ranks with a technical irregularity which he had been quietly nursing, and which effectually put the objection to the vote, and to all those which were depending upon it, out of court, without in any way involving the merits of the tangled case. This sudden collapse of what everyone expected would have been a protracted wrangle, left the court without any more work for the day, and Brandreth found himself in the unexpected enjoyment of a half-holiday. Meditating how he could most profitably employ it, curiosity whispered to him to walk over to Yaxley and introduce himself to its owner.

‘Not that the old lady will care to see the transmitted phiz of the Brandreths. But Madam is stepmamma’s mamma, so it will be only filial to spoon the dowager, and see what sort of a parent my good old dad has got himself. It’s funky all the same, though I want to see the old dragoness.’

It was naughty of Eustace to shape his thoughts in words partaking of the nature of slang, but he took care not to speak it ; and, indeed, his respectful deportment when he reached Yaxley could not have been improved had Lucy been his own mother. When the servant announced Mr. Eustace Brandreth, Mrs. Foulis was lolling in her American chair, thinking of nothing in particular, which

means chewing and turning over in a sort of topsy-turvy fashion all manner of disagreeable topics, as the events of past years kept crowding in upon her memory. Her first impulse was to refuse the unwelcome and unexpected visitor; her second, to obey the laws of courtesy and bid him be shown in. The conversation which ensued is not one which is worth preserving in a *verbatim* report, for the lady was gracefully circumspect and reticent, while Eustace was irreproachably and stupidly commonplace. He could not, as he explained, find himself so near Yaxley, in the discharge of a public duty, without paying his respects to a lady of whom he had heard on all sides nothing but good; particularly as he was

now in an indirect way connected with her. It was not his business to inquire how far his father's marriage had taken place with Mrs. Foulis's approbation, but he could well imagine that she might have desired less disparity of age between her daughter and her son-in-law, and she would at least do him the justice to believe that he had no share in bringing about the match. Now that the families were so connected, his object would be to do his duty to all parties, and promote a harmonious, good understanding. Eustace was quite sincere in all these statements, for he was an honest, good fellow, but yet he uttered them with no great forethought of the effect which they might make upon his auditor. No

sooner was he ushered into Mrs. Foulis's presence than he felt into how delicate and difficult a position his curiosity had led him ; from which he could only make a safe escape by setting a watch upon his tongue. Fortunately for him, his mouth spoke out of the abundance of a good heart, and trivial as he intended his observations to be, they were the trivialities of a fine nature.

Mrs. Foulis, for her part, was surprised and pleased. She naturally held the Brandreths all round to be a bad lot. She had never seen Eustace, and although the little she had been told about him by Mordaunt was good, it had only left a slight impression, coming as it did in the middle of his frightful

revelation of Sir Miles's treachery ; so that at first there was little to lead her to distinguish between the reprobate father and the respectable son. But his character was stamped on his face, his words, and his whole deportment ; and as the interview went on, Colonel Mordaunt's words rose to her mind. With the recollection of them came the reflection that, tied for life as she was to the Brandreth family, she had better make friends with its one white sheep. So, after a turn upon the lawn, and a gracefully refused offer of tea and muffins, Mrs. Foulis screwed herself up to a great effort, and begged Mr. Brandreth, so soon as the registration was closed, to pass a few days at Yaxley, and to arm himself against the

fogs of the Temple, at which he pathetically reported himself as shortly due, by walking through her covers, bad as had been—she apologetically added—the breeding season that spring. Hares and rabbits she had but few, for as her reason bade her keep the killing of them in her own hands, so her duty to her tenants made her spare neither the time of her keepers nor her own money in keeping them down, and withal furnishing the tables of her farmers, to whom the absolute extirpation of their favourite luxury would have been the most woeful of all consummations.

Eustace, on his side, was equally surprised, both at his reception and at the juvenility of his receiver. But for

his own stupidity he would have been thoroughly pleased. He had heard, in various quarters, of Mrs. Foulis's self-reliance and abundance of resource ; so he had in his own mind constructed her presentment as an awful woman, a spectacled dragoon in petticoats, like the scraggy 'Anglaises,' all teeth and ringlets, with whom Cham delighted to adorn the *Charivari*. At the first moment, indeed, of being ushered into Lucy's presence, he took for granted that the attractive young lady by whom he found himself confronted was a companion or visitor ; and all through the interview he was haunted by an awkward suspicion that he had said something which had not only betrayed his blunder, but had re-

vealed the clumsy anticipation behind it. The peccant speech was something in which youth and bright companionship, so he fancied, were referred to with an emphasis which irresistibly led up to the antithesis of maturity and heavy patronage. He was right in his shocking surmise, and clever, quiet Lucy had taken in the entire misapprehension with much inward amusement. Still, she could not fail to be pleased with what was an unintentional compliment to her unexpectedly tolerable person, and as she pitied the floundering stranger so she set him right with apparent unconsciousness. So gracious an invitation, so tactfully put, when he was least expecting any courtesy, and most particularly

after his woeful blunder, fairly carried the lawyer off his legs; so, instead of referring to his memorandum-book, as a man of business ought to have done, and there discovering that he was hopelessly entangled in a coil of imperative engagements, Brandreth blundered out, ' You really are too kind—so unexpected—I shall be so pleased—no, I mean, so honoured,' and took his leave of the widow.

The turn had now come for Mrs. Foulis to be startled at the result of her impetuous civility. The conversation with her new connection had taken a shape which seemed at the instant to be imposing this compliment upon her; so she had propelled an invitation as from a mental catapult. But that in Eustace's

awkward position towards his father he would accept her bidding she never for an instant imagined. Otherwise, as she regretfully recollected when too late, she had visits which she was much bound, and half intended, to pay, and to which she could have, with perfect politeness, referred, as precluding her from offering the otherwise agreeable invitation for the season. An invitation for next year, her after-thought told her, would have quite done the business. She was in for it though, she felt, and she would make the best of her imprudence. But she did not dare to think of inviting any neighbour to meet the stranger, and she particularly dreaded even to tell Featherston of her impetuosity, and much more did she

shudder at the idea of bringing the two together, since her guardian, justly irate with Sir Miles, had protested to her that he would kick even the puppy-dog of any Brandreth if he happened to come across the animal.

A little quiet time would have been particularly acceptable to her, as for other reasons, so because things were not going comfortably in Yaxley school. Murgatroyd, poet and schoolmaster, was a conceited and touchy fool ; and, as fools are often wont to do, he allowed the accounts for which he was officially responsible to drift into a state of confusion, which made it impossible for those who felt most indulgently towards him to say whether his conduct rather

showed imbecility or dishonesty. Miss Larcom, methodical and good-tempered as she was, and clear-headed in her narrow way, could not abide to be connected even indirectly with so slippery a partner, and never let a day pass without telling Mrs. Foulis frankly that unless Murgatroyd were at once got rid of she insisted on resigning. But this quarrel in her favourite school, vexatious though it was, was at that time with Mrs. Foulis only a minor home trouble, let alone the ever present gloom, combining apprehension and self-reproach, which had settled upon Lucy's mind since her child's infatuated marriage.

CHAPTER V.

THE WOES OF TASTE.

EVERYONE knows that the close of the registration nearly corresponds with the commencement of the planting season, when squires bent upon landscape improvements most mightily bestir themselves. Mrs. Foulis was at the time suffering under an acute access of the disease. She had for years been maturing great plans, and always delaying their execution, in a pleasant day-dream of saving up money for a magnifi-

cent wedding-present to Meriel. Now, however, that the events of the season, which had been far from comfortable either to her judgment or to her feelings, and the loss of Meriel's society, such even as it was, left her very solitary, she craved for some countervailing excitement. So she drowned thought, and helped to dispose of her now unappropriated savings by plunging headlong into the dissipation of her long-cherished scheme of landscape-gardening. She had a deep-seated dread of professional improvers, while, with good natural taste and considerable experience in small experiments, she was quite strange to the big engineering exploits which she was meditating. Her table groaned under the accumulation of patiently-collected books

—Repton, Gilpin, Uvedale Price, Loudon, Kempe, Thompson, Robinson ; every chair was littered with plans, sketches, dabs, and daubs. She wanted to begin in twenty places at once with fifty things —mounds, ponds, paths, bridges, lawns, shrubberies, holes, hillocks, vistas, clumps, —and she could not settle on any one as her best first start. Worst of all, she had permanently taken on a power of extra hands, and, as her bailiff and gardener were always dinning into her ears that she must give work to the fellows who were eating off their heads at her expense, she began to think herself in the condition of Michael Scott when he sent his unpleasant familiar devils to make ropes of the sea-sand. ‘But then,’ as she regret-

fully reflected, 'I have no sand and no sea, and my folks are not devils.'

Eustace happened to arrive at Yaxley on the afternoon on which the *tohu-bohu* with the labourers had reached its climax, and Miss Larcom had got unmanageable; while Mrs. Foulis, in her despair at the crisis in her favourite institution, and at herself being for the first time consciously and hopelessly out of her depth in a question of taste within her own special department, was walking up and down the room, muttering that had it not been for the obligations of hospitality which she had so recklessly contracted, she would run off at dead of night, and leave her subordinates to break each other's heads. Eustace was

escorted to his room, and met his hostess for the first time, just before dinner—a meal which, as he heard with much dismay, would be a *tête-à-tête*. This circumstance was just as embarrassing to the lady; but to ask Lidyard, and not ask Featherston, would have been impossible, and to ask any third person, to the exclusion of both, would, in her view, have been absolutely outrageous. All through the meal Lucy, preoccupied with her various troubles, was grave and silent, or, if she spoke at all, it was sure to be at cross purposes. The visitor naturally jumped to the conclusion that Sir Miles's son, in taking his invitation literally, had committed a social offence; so he blushed, fidgeted, and became a little more awk-

ward even than the lady of the house. Fortunately he had not engaged himself at Yaxley for any definite period. This was the 'dressed day;' to-morrow would be the 'rest day,' and he felt sure that he would not be confronted with the offer of the 'pressed day.' After two nights he would be able to deliver his entertainer from his oppressive presence, and pick up the threads of his own imperative occupations, which a longer truancy would have brought into a condition of hopeless entanglement.

At last the servants left the room, and then Mrs. Foulis, anxious to break a silence which was worrying her, particularly as its effect on her guest had not escaped her keen eyes, opened her whole

budget of gardening troubles to the visitor, of whose sympathy she felt instinctively sure. Eustace, much relieved by this very unexpected turn in the conversation, was able to reciprocate not only with sympathy, but with solid, pertinent advice. It came out that, among the various desultory pursuits which he allowed to cross and hamper his steady professional career, both surveying and the study of the picturesque had asserted their claims upon his attention. He could draw plans, and sketching in water-colours was a favourite idleness ; while upon the growth and coloration of trees he had plenty to say which was well worthy of being listened to, even by a lady to whom such advice was apt to

imply outlay. As he spoke he warmed with his subject, and rattled on more for his own satisfaction than for the instruction of his auditor.

When he paused, Mrs. Foulis observed, 'Really, Mr. Brandreth, you are a godsend. Do take pity upon a poor lone woman, and stop and help me with your advice in the peck of troubles which I have brought upon me by my own folly, in attempting works far too big and complicated for me to carry through with my want of experience. I am really serious. If I find no friend to advise me, I must send for some professional, and I should dread meeting him as I do my dentist. He would upset all I had done, cut and slash away all my plantations, and force



me to swallow his crude, first thoughts about a place which he would not take the trouble to walk over—me who know and love every old tree like a brother, and every young one like a child.'

There was, of course, but one answer to make to so genuine an appeal, though the avenging ghosts of outraged engagements rose grim before the eyes of the reckless barrister. The bailiff and the gardener at first looked askance at the interfering visitor, but they soon learned to think themselves lucky at the unlooked - for arrival of one who showed that he had both the will and the power to introduce order and method into their desultory and hitherto lavishly expensive operations ; and if the former did not

exactly exclaim to his sister Anna, Lucy's
trusty maid,

‘Quis novus hic nostris successit sedibus hospes?’
or complain of being frightened by bad
dreams, he certainly gave a character of
Eustace in his racy Midland Doric which
even Dido would have accepted as no
inapt description of *Æneas*. There was
but one voice ever raised in abatement
of his merits in the little parliament
which used to debate in the steward's
room at Yaxley. Excellent Mr. Halwell,
the old keeper, would stretch out his
legs, and solemnly say,—

‘It's all very well a-cryin' up the
young fellow, but, with his trapsin's, and
trampin's, and diggin's, and plantin's, the
shootin' is a-goin' to Old Nick. The

birds are gettin' as wild as hawks, and the poachers are a-loafin' about that owdacious that it's a dozen snares I've taken up if it's one: and here he's been a fortnight and more, and only twice out; and what makes the matter a tarnation shame is that he *can* shoot when he likes!

‘In fact,’ he slowly continued, stroking, as was his wont, his left legging, and looking round with that furtive glance which had led Lucy, with whom the old fellow was a great favourite, to dub him the wild cat of the forest; ‘in fact, I can’t help a-suspectin’ there be somethin’ between the young chap and the lady. They be so tender like.’

‘Then you’ll just keep your suspicions and your somethings and your tender-

nesses to yourself, you will, Mr. Halwell. It is positively disgusting to hear you talking of an old lady such as Mrs. Foulis is, and so many years an honest widow, throwing herself away on a young ne'er-do-well, and the son of the gallows-bird who's stole Miss Meriel! I'm ashamed of you, Mr. Halwell; and I'll just ask Mr. Williams to turn you out if you don't keep your filthy tongue a little bit more in order in Mrs. Foulis's own steward's room.'

This vigorous champion of Mrs. Foulis's freedom of fancy was Mrs. Kershaw, the cook—'Mrs.' by brevet rank. She was the latest recruit of the Yaxley establishment, and, except for her singular professional capacity and personal steadiness, the least congenial member of it. Tall and sour, glib

of tongue, and never losing the opportunity of spitting out something to the disadvantage of all who might find themselves within the range of that tongue, Mrs. Kershaw was feared, not loved, by her fellow-servants, and feared by no one more than by that good, old-fashioned, easy-going soul, Williams, whose butlership dated from the days when his mistress was still Miss Curteis. A word from him might at any time have rid the family of its unwelcome member. But that word he never would speak, for, in truth, with all his fear another feeling was mixed. Whatever else the cook was, she was thrifty, and wise in her investments, and rumour declared her, for her station in life, wealthy. This Williams,

some two years a widower, well knew, and in his secret heart the expectation flickered of some day sharing that wealth. Mrs. Kershaw saw through his game, and inwardly resolved as she was, never to gratify Williams's ambition, she used the influence which her discovery had given her, to maintain the rule of iron with which she dominated the steward's room. The keeper so insulted began rubbing both leggings with either hands, and those who knew him well were aware that this action on his part always presaged an outburst. So Williams hastily proposed a rubber of whist, he and Lucy's maid against Halwell and Mrs. Kershaw. The ruse succeeded, and, as usual, the astute capitalist won many penny points.

CHAPTER VI.

DETECTION.

DINNER at Taxley was usually a silent meal, for, in truth, lady and gentleman were equally tired with the afternoon's employment, and equally shy before the servants; but once Lucy's darling library was gained, then study, not play, would be the order of the day. The table was swept of books and trifles, and Eustace, ceremoniously ensconced in an arm-chair, would, with a grave frown, and squared lips, set to

making and tearing up, and making again, little plans on sheets of foolscap paper, and dabbing in effects of light and shade (colour by candle-light being impossible), in which queer blotches of Indian ink, which might be clouds and looked more like spills, or the casual effects of a brush carelessly tossed down, were said to represent trees. Whatever he did was piously accepted by the much-engrossed lady, who would stand by the table till standing became rather tiring, and then would perhaps lean on the back of his chair—‘because, sitting down, one can’t make oneself high enough to judge properly.’ Drawing plans and sketching effects is not what, in the general estimation of gay society, would

be thought a cheerful way of spending the evenings in a country house; but, somehow, the occupation is apt to be much enlivened when a pretty woman is leaning over your chair, gently laughing in your ear, and interrupting the current of your thoughts and the course of your pencil by criticisms, all of which imply some half-expressed compliment to the amateur artist.

Eustace was always proposing to leave, and something would always occur which compelled Mrs. Foulis to request, as a particular favour, that he would put himself to the inconvenience of stopping just a little longer. She would plead at breakfast,—‘I know I am very troublesome indeed, and you must hate the sight

of me ; but they are just at work on the new mound by the East Approach, and I can't help thinking it will want a little more rounding at the top, and the hollow at the side is surely hardly scooped enough ; it is so formal, and shows like a trench, and not a natural coomb.' At another time she was in sore bewilderment whether to place a group of variegated Wellingtonias on the top of Bilberry Bank, where they would make a landmark, or to dispose them at the bottom of the new glade, in contrast to some copper beeches, 'which I must, I think, order. Don't you agree, Mr. Brandreth ?'

One morning Mrs. Foulis appeared at breakfast more distraught than was her usual wont, and before she had well

poured out the tea she said, in a rapid tone, curiously combining decision and perplexity, and looking Eustace straight in the face, 'I can't palter any longer. The decision must be reached now, at once and irrevocably.'

The young man had not the slightest idea what the matter was which gave such evident trouble to his hospitable hostess; so he could only answer by tendering his poor assistance if it were acceptable.

'Of course it is. You are the only man who can help me, and upon whom I rely as a friend who will not deceive me.'

Eustace felt very odd, and believed that he was trembling, but contrived to blunder out, 'Am I really ?'

‘Of course you are. Don’t you know the decision we must come to?’

‘I have not the slightest idea.’

Lucy bit her lip in vexation, but went on: ‘Why, of course, don’t you see, then? I must decide by return of post, so Weekes tells me, or it will be too late for the plants next season, whether I stick a conservatory on to the house; and the choice is so perplexing. I should have the creepers, and the bananas, and the palms to go to, wet or dry, and open after dinner; and Chinese lamps among the branches would be so lovely. But then I fear the big new thing would spoil the lines of the dear old house, and that would kill me with vexation; and it would be so garish

next the brickwork with its weathering and its lichens. I might, to be sure, paint it Indian red—certainly not white paint; but even then ?'

Eustace was reassured, and plunged into the controversy. At length the lady was brought cheerfully to abandon a project which would have ruined the antique charms of her picturesque abode. But Messrs. Weekes had to wait more than one post before the order was countermanded.

A time at last was reached when even plans had not always to be made and remade; and the evenings became more and more frequent on which the good-natured hostess insisted on Eustace giving a holiday to his overworked

fingers. The lawyer at this began some conventional compliments, concluding with the commonplace, that he was sure that one so accomplished as Mrs. Foulis must be equally devoted to, and accomplished in, music. He had not, indeed, noticed the piano, but no doubt it was in some room not usually opened ; and then if——Lucy, half taken aback and half amused, burst into a loud laugh, and confessed that her childish music lessons had so bored her that she had dropped, and by this time clean forgotten, the accomplishment. She could, to be sure, sing hymns without an instrument ; and would Eustace join her in this delightful pastime ? Choir practice was twice a-week at the school, and the presence of an

accomplished critic would give a wholesome fillip to the boys. It was now his turn to be abashed, and he did not carry off the exposure half so well as the lady. Yet the reciprocal confession—deficient music—was a comfort to him, as it let in his favourite foible. With a smirk, meant to be modest, and called by Lucy shy, the self-conscious scholar would beg permission to be allowed to read just a little poetry, merely to send Mrs. Foulis asleep; the truth being that reading aloud was an accomplishment of which he was more vain than of the more solid gifts with which he was so abundantly provided.

Lucy would then place herself in her much-loved rocking-chair on the other

side of the table, at which, with an air and a grace very different from his usual unconstrained and manly gesture, Eustace would somewhat ceremoniously arrange himself, the book in his right hand, while with his left he kept up a running accompaniment between beating time and playing the devil's tattoo. The knowing little woman had entered into the plan with a roguish intention of provoking Eustace's evident vanity. But, alas ! her tender heart betrayed her critical soul. She sat down to tease the reader, and she sat on to be pleased by the reading. Eustace laboured like a man who had taken the assembly-room of a South-Coast watering-place for a Shakespearian course, and he was rewarded by Mrs. Foulis de-

claring that she had never before properly understood Tennyson's 'Princess.' Nay, his rendering of 'Romeo and Juliet' was, in the opinion of his indulgent critic, quite an original version of a piece which required a poetical insight, such as he possessed, to unlock its treasure of pathos and diction. Sometimes, indeed, these more intellectual pursuits would be varied by a game of backgammon ; but such was the unwonted and inexplicable proclivity of either player to make blots or mistake the tables, that the game used imperceptibly to transform itself into one of those general conversations which most easily grow up when they are unpremeditated. It was by casual hints and half confidences unintentionally

dropped during these chats, and pieced together by the alert mind of Eustace, that he learned to read the character of his hostess as he had never done before.

When at first the shy barrister began his visit at Yaxley, the widow (as he kept on calling her to himself) was a charming woman ; young for her age, clever and cheery, full alike of good spirits and good principles. Now she gradually revealed herself as one who had been much wronged, and nobly bore herself against those wrongs, without the help of that sympathy which the world is so stupidly or so jealously apt to withhold from rich sufferers, under a sort of heathen prepossession that persons who seem to be prosperous in worldly

advantages owe a sacrifice to Nemesis. Casual hints which fell from Lucy led the young man to appreciate that she was a woman who had in tender years been schooled by a training which would have spoiled most characters; so that her receiving benefit, not harm, from it, proved the superiority of an exceptional nature. Her faults, to which he was not blind, would have been more and greater in most people with a training like hers, and her merits far less genuine. He left off calling her the widow to himself, as he could no longer bear to think of her in connexion with other and baser natures. She was now Lucy to his thoughts—a creature standing by herself, in the paradise of her own high intentions

robed in her own vesture of unequalled purity.

With deepened sympathy for Lucy's character, and a more clear insight into its elements, Eustace's tone naturally grew more grave and intense. She, too, instinctively felt the change, and in response unconsciously and gradually unlocked to him the more secret chambers of her confidence. Lucy, for the first time in her life, was led to ask another's pity for her solitude as a child without playmates, and as a woman without intellectual companionship ; and the scar of her aunt's tyranny again became livid in her struggle to excuse it as the unintentional cruelty of an idiot. At last she found courage to speak openly of the

hideous episode of her ephemeral marriage, as she never had done to human being before, and even to drop words about the unutterable anguish of an ungrateful child. Eustace, in receiving these confidences, felt himself almost charged with spiritual responsibilities towards one whose motive in laying bare the secrets of her guileless heart was neither vanity nor discontent, but the unalloyed desire of self-improvement; and as he offered the conclusions from them which made for Lucy's comfort, his own moral nature grew in purity and power.

Mingling with these higher feelings, another, of which he was half ashamed, and which he was always endeavouring to stifle, would go on intruding itself

into Eustace's brain, and confounding all his most magnanimous conclusions. He had been so often and so intimately consulted about the spending and the withholding of large sums of money upon Mrs. Foulis's property,—he had, in fact, so completely drifted, in reference to what the gardener sententiously designated the 'amenities,' into a position, if not of co-proprietorship, at least of all the trouble and all the enjoyment to which improving proprietors are heirs,—that he was continually catching himself out as thinking of Yaxley, as if it were somehow his own. Mrs. Foulis stupidly helped on the temptation, as she would continually accost him upon 'our last improvement,' 'our walk up here,' 'our

mound down there,' 'the effect which I hope we may succeed in enjoying,' and so forth. Eustace would, when the lively lady had run on in this strain, interpose —too laughingly, it must be owned, to secure the serious attention at which he was aiming.

' You mean, which *you* will enjoy, my dear Mrs. Foulis. Next spring you will be revelling in the hills and dales, the forests and the lakes, which your creative genius has called into being; while I, poor wretch! in my dingy den at the Temple, expect no happier fate than to pore over briefs, or spin out my wits' work for greedy editors.'

On this Lucy would smile a silent, inscrutable smile, pitiful and gracious,

but secretive and self-reliant; and Eustace would detect himself twaddling, and perhaps propose to the already tired lady to make a fresh pilgrimage to some spot which they had already visited two or three times that very morning.

Generally speaking, Lucy submitted with much good humour to the superfluous toil, but upon one occasion she flatly refused to leave the house again, and said with some bitterness, for in truth she felt twinges of a toothache which pride forbade her to confess, 'Really, Mr. Brandreth, your occupation in life seems walking with me.'

'Life's walk with such a companion would be indeed an enviable occupation.'

'What a blind, poor creature you

must be not to be able to walk alone.'

So saying she speeded to her room, where she sought and found comfort in a bottle of creosote.

Eustace, thoroughly snubbed, sought the comfort he could not find in a volume of South's Sermons which he casually took from the shelves.

CHAPTER VII.

ADAM'S WEATHER-GLASS.

UTUMN kept closing in as the days grew shorter and colder, but the intrepid pair went labouring on, cheering or chiding the obedient hands, till the mounds and the pools had assumed something of their intended effect of woody banks and half-hidden streamlets. At last, a November day came, such as the English climate sometimes produces, intensely calm, hot as summer, but with a damp, close heat, which makes the recollection even of a north-

east wind tolerable. No clouds were visible, nor yet blue sky, but a sort of compromise between the two, in a grey transparent vapour, not soaring upwards like a vault, but hanging like a canopy over the face of the earth.

In short, the day was so stifling that even Mrs. Foulis and Mr. Brandreth, with all their activity and enthusiasm in improving, discovered that it was impossible to run about in such oppressive air; so, after some abortive attempts at stepping out a proposed new path, they sought rest in a summer-house which stood in a spot already so lovely that it had been specially and emphatically exempted from any scheme of improvement. Yet its beauty was very simple, and was perhaps

the result of accident, in the remarkable gracefulness of form and happily contrasted gradations of colour of a little group of trees bounding the view on one side, with which the eye was refreshed, in combination with the rounded outlines of an expanse of turf of that softest and most intense green which can only be found where the growth is of moss, and not of grass. Some days earlier the spectacle would have been even more entrancing, for the lime-trees which now stood naked were arrayed in the bright pale gold into which the foliage of that provoking tree is transmuted in the few days of its premature autumn, leaving regrets for its speedy departure, which is ill compensated for, even by the rich



purple of the buds. But the famous liquidambar of Yaxley was in the fullest fire-glow of its transcendent glory, thrown out as that was by the contrasted velvet of an adjacent silver fir.

‘How hot it is!’ gasped Eustace.

‘Dreadfully hot!’ murmured Lucy.

‘The glass, too, was rising this morning,’ he continued, with the air of a man communicating a valuable secret.

‘The glass is a humbug, I believe.’

‘Well, now, you remind me of my old tutor at college, who used to get quite angry when anybody talked of the weather-glass.’

‘Stupid old man!’

‘But you, yourself, have just been calling it a humbug.’

‘Does the weather-glass being a humbug prove your tutor clever?’ she asked, with true feminine logic.

‘Perhaps not. But it’s unnatural to garden without looking at the weather-glass. I wonder whether Adam had a weather-glass in Eden.’

‘What makes you think of Eden now?’

‘Your garden, of course.’

Mrs. Foulis was half vexed at the triviality of his talk, while her conscience told her that her own remarks were no better; so she rather pettishly answered, ‘Indeed, Mr. Brandreth, we must leave off bandying these stupid conjectures about Adam and weather-glasses, or we shall begin proving that my untidy wilderness is Paradise.’

‘Without a peradventure, this is Paradise ; and it can claim its Eve as lawful tenant of its glades,’ responded Eustace, with a half ironical intonation, which aptly set off the grand-seigneur reverence with which he concluded his sententious compliment.

Mrs. Foulis never could resist a friendly tournament of wit when she was under the excitement of good spirits ; so, with much precipitancy and conspicuous, though momentary, confusion as to Biblical facts, she rejoined, ‘An Eve perhaps, but, happily, no Adam to beguile her.’

The words were hardly past her lips before she felt how absurdly she had put her foot into it, and she turned as red as a turkey-cock, and laboured with vain

thoughts after some second sentence which could turn the edge of her own terrible suggestion. Eustace saved her the trouble by quietly replying, 'I don't see why that deficiency should go on.'

So saying, with the switch in his left hand, he flicked the outstanding toe of his boot, and with his right he grasped the hand of Mrs. Foulis. She let him take it without a trace of displeasure or resistance, but neither by word, look, nor responsive squeeze, did she acknowledge his loving advance. After some moments' delay, Eustace resumed, in a lower and graver tone, 'What is the use of going on with this purposeless dawdling? Heaven knows that neither of us ever expected this when you in-

vited me here; but it has come to pass, and we must face facts. Can't you say "Yes," and put an end to it ?'

Mrs. Foulis did not say 'Yes,' but still less did she say 'No.' She did not withdraw her hand, nor did she by the slightest quiver of a single finger seem to recognise that it was within Eustace's grasp. Another silent interval occurred, and then again he spoke.

'Won't you answer me ?'

'Have not I been answering you all the afternoon, and setting right your stupid muddle about the weather-glass ?'

'Yes; but you have not answered my last question.'

'How could I ? You don't want me to throw myself at your head. We are

not on a desert island yet, and my way home, at least, is quite clear.'

Mrs. Foulis uttered these words with just a little too much of artificial indignation for success, and jumping up, strode towards the mansion with so quick a pace as to leave her lover quite distanced and breathless before they reached the door. Her five o'clock tea was taken to her bedroom, and she came down to dinner with unwonted unpunctuality. That evening hostess and visitor were both seized with a desire to play backgammon, and for once they were so intent over their hits, badly played as these were, that conversation was banned.

'Good night,' at last said Eustace, as

he handed the flat candlestick to the lady of the house.

‘Better night, I hope, than day,’ answered Lucy; and added, ‘Law! how you are spilling the wax and spoiling everything, and all was so nice with me before you came.’

This was enigmatical, but said so archly as not to be crushing.

‘Better night than day,’ Eustace muttered when he got up on the following morning. To him the day before had been the best of days he had ever passed. It had been one of exquisite happiness; for although Lucy still kept herself free, he fancied that a little more persuasion would leave him the affianced husband of that peerless woman. Next morning

all seemed different. She was cold, shy, awkward, silent ; she avoided speaking, or, if she spoke, it was to contradict, to snub, or to take offence. He asked her at breakfast in the deferential accents of his earlier days at Yaxley, what were her plans for the morning, and she merely jerked out, 'How can I tell ?' He remarked in a tone of genuine concern that she was looking pale, and she caught him up with, 'Well, and if I am, what's that to you ? You don't want me to put on rouge, I suppose.' Eustace talked of leaving, and she never told him to stay.

A man less deeply in love, or more versed in woman's character, would have drawn comfort from these visible struggles

of a strong but excitable and much-tried nature with a late-awakened love, of which she was beginning to feel the strength more than she had ever believed herself capable of feeling, or even thought it right to own. The pride of consistency, the pride of position, and the pride of solitary power, were all seething in her perturbed mind, and struggling to stifle the quick growth of her new pure affection. Had her first husband left her any legacy of regret or respect, they might have prevailed. But her never yet satisfied yearning after a marriage of the heart, of which she was for the first time becoming conscious, came in aid and turned the scale. Much as she had gone through, the monotony of her healthy, useful, occu-

pied pilgrimage had wiped out the count of years, and left her, for all essential purposes, midway between twenty and thirty, with the long vista of a fresh life suddenly open. Of all this struggle Eustace was blankly ignorant, and only saw a peevish, capricious woman, who encouraged him one day in order to mortify him on the morrow ; and who would, he felt sure, follow his departing figure with a mocking laugh. She had, he said to himself, sucked his brains over her confounded improvements, and that was all she had ever really wanted of him. To Eustace, the bachelor, the smiles which came from her in spite of herself, were the death-warrant of all his yesterday's expectations, for to his distempered eye they only told

of cold-blooded ridicule. He felt himself like the rash traveller who had toiled all the night, and through the following morning, and who in two or three more paces would have placed his foot on the peak of some glorious and untrodden Alpine summit, when a single false step sends him rolling and bounding down black rock and cruel snow till he lodges, thousands of feet below, in some dark gully, a gory, shapeless mass of crushed-up bone and muscle. If he could only turn to the wall and blubber like a whipped child, he might bear it ; but to sit wearing that false face of calm unconcern was intolerable. He would rush out of the house ; he would run to the station ; he would quit at once,

and for ever, Yaxley and its heartless mistress.

While Eustace was making up his mind to this valorous resolve, the servant came in with the second delivery of letters. The first he opened was from his clerk, speaking, with all the sharpness of which their relative positions admitted, of the delay and inconvenience which his protracted absence from chambers occasioned. The faithful dependant had too much reason to believe that a brief after which Eustace had long been hankering was at last sent by the solicitor on whom he mainly leaned for advancement, to that pert son of an enormously rich member for a Yorkshire borough whose unrestrained chaff had long

been the chief of Eustace's minor miseries. He opened a second letter in a wild hope of finding comfort there, and it was from the Editor of *Tyburnia*, reminding his truant writer, with that courtesy which preludes a rupture, that his contribution to the next number was long overdue.

Now, indeed, the blackness of darkness had gathered completely round him. *Judico me cremari*, he thought. He had entered Yaxley poor, but a hero; this heroism had been sacrificed at the foot of a widow and a fortune, and she had spurned him so soon as she had spoiled him of his nobility. Now he was departing, not only poor, but a pauper; his pleasurable means of fame-winning livelihood cut away by his own reckless

conceit. So engrossed was he in his own troubles that he never perceived that Lucy was bending in tearless amazement over another letter, as, with her disengaged hand, she twitched her gown, and with one foot dealt quick continuous kicks to the footstool. Had he listened, he might have heard her muttering, ‘It can’t be hers, it can’t be hers, though the writing is hers ; too clever, too cruel, too devilish ! Oh, the man into whose hands my poor child has fallen victim is there in every word of it ! And I let her go—I sent her to Ireland ! Oh, my folly ! oh, my sin !’

Sir Miles, with all his cunning, had misread the character of Mrs. Foulis, and fancied, from the proneness with which

she ran into the trap baited by him in the letter, palmed by him upon Meriel, that she was a fond, pliable creature. ‘Once we are tied, and can’t be untied, she’ll be whistling us back to herself,’ was his prophecy ; and although he was somewhat surprised at the tone of Lucy’s reply to Meriel after the marriage—ignorant as he was of the turn which Mordaunt had so unconsciously done him—he set it down as pout, and, waiting till ‘Mater’ should mollify, forbade Meriel to answer. It is but fair to say that she did not acquiesce in this heartless advice without a fight, but it was the last in which filial affection took any part. After weeks of waiting, Lucy wrote again, more urgently, more sadly, and more

reproachfully ; and then Sir Miles told his wife that they must make a stand, and show a little firmness.

Accordingly he composed for her a letter, framed by calculation to be cold, hard, and unfeeling, in which he made her lay down the categorical conditions on which alone she would condescend for the future to recognise her mother. The principal features of this proposal were free quarters at Yaxley for the couple and any family they might have, and an allowance upon selves and family, amounting to some thousands a-year, during the lifetime of Mrs. Foulis, to be irrevocably secured by deed.

Sir Miles thought his way more clear for claiming these concessions now that

he had shaken off Miss Robbins and repudiated the promises, confiding in which, that worthless but unhappy woman had forfeited all the benefits of her Delicia's patronage. He was prepared, had she called him to account, to have justified himself by pleading that his promises to her had been made in her character of confidante to Lady Foulisville, and in consideration of the influence which that position gave her; so that with its loss, which he must impute to her own misbehaviour, the promise equally lapsed.

Happily for the honour of human nature, the discarded favourite never gave him the opportunity of urging this base excuse, for she crawled away, crushed and impotent, from Fontarabia, and slunk

into her own hole, nor ever, after her one letter to the Baronet, did she attempt to address either Brandreth or the Foulisvilles.

At last Eustace made a spasmodic effort to shake off the stupor which he felt growing upon him, and tear himself away from the ill-omened house and the fickle coquette who had befooled him. He had forgotten, in his reverie, everything, even where the door stood; so he glanced round the room for the means of escape, and then, for the first time, he appreciated that he was in the company of a woman evidently in deep, silent agony of mind over some unexpected communication.

Lucy's expression, as she conned over Meriel's letter, made Eustace pause in

his resolution of running away. Had she been his declared enemy, and not the frivolous creature who was trifling with his heart, he could hardly retreat at that moment without some explanation; so he turned his eye on Lucy as she read and re-read the fatal writing. She finished her third or fourth perusal of the hateful words, and then, looking at him, but not in anger, handed him the epistle and gasped, ‘What am I to do after this?’

Preoccupied as he was with his own troubles, he read it at first somewhat mechanically, but for the second time with a knitted brow and scowling face. Then he looked at Lucy, and perceived that she had sunk upon a chair quivering in every limb and drinking his

expression with a sad intensity which spoke of love and confidence and longing blended with an outside sorrow; so he returned the letter to its owner, and said, in a calm, low, slow voice, 'After this you can say "Yes" to my question of yesterday.'

Mrs. Foulis seized his hand, and gave the squeeze which he had vainly expected the afternoon before, and then burst into a long, hearty fit of hysterical crying. So likewise did Eustace.

CHAPTER VIII.

LEGATUS NATUS.

EVEN lovers so absurdly doting as Lucy and Eustace suddenly discovered themselves to be, must talk of business, particularly when the lady counts thirty-four years, and the gentleman is only one year younger, and looking his age, while she would have been taken to be several summers on the right side of thirty. All persons who cared to think in any way upon the matter had formed the opinion that

upon Lucy Curteis's marriage with Captain Foulis she had acted under some provision of her father's will, and had tied up her property, exclusively and irrevocably, upon the issue of that marriage; otherwise how could she assert that, come what may, it would be Meriel's? There was no one to contradict the report. Swettenham, who had presumably made the settlement, was dead; Musgrave kept to himself, and never gossiped; Featherston was no lawyer, and hated to talk on legal matters; while to Lucy not only were any references to her ill-starred marriage repulsive, but her recollections of its incidents were permanently blurred and distorted, owing to the mental and

bodily shock of her sudden widowhood and her daughter's quickly-following birth. So Mrs. Rees had it all her own way, and was able, to her heart's content, to abuse Mrs. Foulis, her father, Featherston, 'whom all the world knows to be a humbug,' and 'that old fool, Swettenham,' for having allowed the patrimony of the Curteises to fall into the clutches of a penniless adventurer.

Mrs. Rees's special line of evil-speaking took this form, as from the day that Featherston's relation, who afterwards turned out so badly, was named first incumbent of that new church which made the quarrel, she vowed supplementary vengeance against that most inoffensive man. She might have relented on

the downfall of the clergyman, by which Featherston **himself** was severely hit, if the partner of his disgraceful swindle of a sham agency office had not been a discarded clerk, whose appointment as schoolmaster of the old church had been a particular job of her own, and who was the only man who ever evaded repaying money borrowed from Mr. Rees. Miss Turner's position was a different one, as her central wrong had always been old Miss Harriett's banishment, from which she had really suffered severely in material comforts; and, as Captain Foulis had been that silly woman's spoilt darling, she was bound to think more tenderly of the insinuating scamp than it suited her robust confederate to do.

So, while she would condemn the settlement as all wrong, she would add her feeble regrets that Miss Harriett's advice had not been attended to. When people asked her what that advice was, she would only answer, 'It was a burning shame it wasn't taken. Think of my poor dear friend, hounded to death, when she might have saved the family!'

Outside of the Yaxley country the same delusion prevailed. Lady Foulisville had no doubt about the settlement, and loudly praised it, as due to an overruling Providence, which had thus poured the wealth of the Curteises into the lap of a Foulis. Above all things, to Sir Miles and Meriel it was, as we know, a foregone conclusion. So Eustace, who

had heard the gossip before it had become a matter of personal interest, never dreamed of questioning the fact, while, with his punctilious sense of honour, he dreaded acting or thinking as a fortune-hunter. Still, it was the duty of a revising barrister to proceed according to rule and order ; so, as soon as Lucy's paroxysm of laughing and crying was calmed, he led her to serious conversation, and asked her, in language which he made intelligible to her non-legal mind, if it were true that, as Captain Foulis's widow, she had only a life-interest in her father's patrimony, and that after her death it would all vest absolutely in Meriel.

‘It is quite true,’ she answered.

‘What an odd fellow your father must have been to suppose you would only marry once, and to let you put all your eggs in one basket !’

‘There is only one egg, and that’s Meriel.’

‘But are you really quite sure ?’

‘More than sure. Have not both Swettenham and Featherston told me so ?’

‘Then there’s nothing to settle, for sure I am that my father has not a brass farthing to give me, and would not let me have it if he had one.’

‘Let’s settle ourselves, and be happy,’ she responded, with such a tone and such a smile that his only possible answer was a kiss, which effectually addled all further business talk.

‘After play comes work,’ thought Eustace on the following morning, as the couple buckled to to arrange about the marriage. The first question, ‘put off, or at once,’ was by acclamation decided in favour of ‘at once.’ ‘How’ followed upon ‘when,’ and then divided counsels appeared, and, we are sorry to say, some inconsistency, in the little senate. Lucy urged reverential considerations, which are now, happily, as common as they are laudable. The banns should be published in the face of the congregation alike for rich and poor. There should be arches, flowers, music, clergy in the plural, a breakfast for the rich, and merry-making for the poor.

Eustace was the last man in the

world to gainsay opinions with which, as a general principle, he heartily agreed; but, situated as they two were, he felt it his duty calmly to point out the peculiar difficulties of their position. Could she ask those objectionable Foulisvilles, after their behaviour regarding Meriel, as to which both Lucy and Eustace were still misled from their ignorance of Delicia's illness, and confirmed in their displeasure by her infatuated letter? Was she, on the other hand, prepared to make open enemies for life of Meriel's uncle and aunt by leaving them out? Again—and that was the most serious consideration—how could she open her house to Sir Miles and Lady Brandreth, after her daughter's atrocious letter? and if she

did, how would she ever get them out again?

Lucy felt the force of these objections, but, like a true woman, still wished to show a little fight before she openly surrendered. So she began feebly defending her position with a series of petty admissions, inconsistent with the premises which they claimed to support. In her innocent craftiness she meant Eustace to take advantage of her faulty reasoning, so as to rescue her from her own false position. But the simple fellow, little versed as yet in women's ways, and terribly in earnest over his new sensation of love, instead of appreciating and playing Lucy's game, got seriously angry at what he thought was her stupidity and

weakness. Actually the man got angry whose fame as a writer of sparkling romance in no small degree rested on the success with which he could hit off womanly caprice. In fact, he had so schooled himself in this accomplishment as to have blunted his native intuition into character. Instead of analysing from the incidents revealed to him, he would build upon them without recollecting how incomplete and fragmentary the foundation was. So the demon of suspicion made a lodgment in his mind, and whispered to him that Lucy was a fool. To be sure, he was too much in love to admit the terrible charge himself. Still he was rather scared at this peep into his life's prospect with his chosen yoke-fellow; and, as angry men will do, he began himself

to play the fool, by turning his back upon his own wise counsels, and declaiming about shaming their enemies (and somebody else) by a public and splendid wedding. There must be this, he argued, and that, and the other, to make it all worthy of the lady of Yaxley, and a dozen bridesmaids, even if as many counties had to be beaten up for them.

At this burst, poor Lucy meekly dropped, ‘But I’m a widow, Eustace dear, and can’t have bridesmaids at all.’

This remark, commonplace as it was, brought the angry racer sharply up upon its haunches. For bridesmaids in themselves Eustace cared as little as for wedding-cake ; but it recalled to a memory which was willingly wandering the real

condition of matters. Captain Foulis, to him, was prehistoric, and he had never seen Meriel, and she had been, except on special occasions, virtually out of his recollection ; while Lucy was in appearance, in deportment, and in freshness of mind, some seven or eight years younger than her legal age of thirty-four. So in his rambling imagination there had grown up a charming picture of a wedding—all veils and orange-flowers, Brussels lace and bridesmaids, such as he had seen in Mr. Kempe's and Mr. Liddell's churches. Suddenly the appalling fact was revealed that the central object for which all the arches would be built, the grandeses assemble, the archdeacon assist the vicar, and the organ peal the Wedding March,

would be a lady attired, not in a veil, but in a bonnet, walking in solitude up the church, with no obsequious *cortège* of parti-coloured damsels.

‘A widow’s wedding should be a quiet wedding,’ he said to himself, but to Lucy he put it more gracefully. ‘Of all women, of course you least need the fictitious *éclat* of any bridesmaids. And while I do not agree in all you have been saying, there is a good deal in it: so, on the whole, I have, while we have been talking over the matter, come to the conclusion that, as we stand, the more quiet we keep it the better it will be. You know there are those who would take a malicious advantage of any *contretemps*.’

Lucy and Eustace were neither of them persons to be content with half measures, and having thus agreed upon the necessity of keeping the wedding quiet, they ran a race as to who could suggest the most entire quietness, and completely cut off display and publicity, till at last they reached the determination of making it what Eustace in later days laughingly described as an experiment in legal clandestinity. Matter-of-fact people may reasonably think them somewhat silly for having reached this conclusion, and we fancy that after the first enthusiasm of what was to both of them, in spite of their respective ages, the day-spring of young love, was over, Mr. and Mrs. Brandreth themselves owned that

they had been a little fantastic. But they were then both of them at a high pressure of excitement, for each had, for the first time in their respective lives, an assured prospect of happy home companionship.

Eustace had never known the meaning of being at home, except in the coveted days of residence at his beloved college, where the pleasure of companionship, though taken genially, was at the bottom a selfish one. With Lucy the revelation of domesticity in all the width of its mysterious sweetness was even more overwhelming. Now, at last, in her soul and in her heart, the great clear spring of true, unselfish love, smothered by Miss Harriett, outraged and dissipated

by Augustus Foulis, reduced to commonplace by Featherston, and frozen by Meriel, was welling up with irresistible impetuosity. She was longing for a romance — pure, laudable, lovely in the sight of men and angels,—still a romance ; and as the one which had come to her was essentially so innocent, who could grudge to the woman whose whole life had been so good, the gratification, before youth had quite passed away, of one eccentricity ? No one likely to hold communication with Yaxley, neither servants nor retainers, with one exception, was to have any inkling of the coming event, with the indispensable exception of the clergyman ; and no one, except the clergyman and the witnesses, was to

know that the marriage had taken place until the couple were safely on the road to the station. Mrs. Foulis, as we have said, entertained at first strong scruples about banns; there was something, she said, ostentatious, irreverential, about a license. Eustace quite shared in this feeling, but pointed out that a license was one thing, and a special license another. What could be so ecclesiastical or so solemn as the direct permission of the Primate of All England and Metropolitan, *Legatus Natus* of the Holy See, granting that gracious indulgence in direct exercise of his legatine authority—an indulgence which the combination of a thousand Archbishops of York would be powerless to concede?

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CHAPTER IX.

CONSEQUENT ARRANGEMENTS.

ONCE the great question was solved, consequent arrangements shaped themselves with inconceivable precision, subject always — a matter of nervous apprehension to Lucy — to the Vicar's approbation. Mr. Lidyard was wont on every Wednesday morning to have an early celebration. The attendance of herself and of Eustace there could not possibly cause any surprise, for it was an incident which had already occurred more



than once. Let Wednesday week, then, be the day. The communicants went quickly away, and they two could easily linger about till the ground was quite clear, and then, if only Mr. Lidyard was propitious, a quarter of an hour more would make them one. They would walk home by the diggings, as a plausible reason to the servants for the slight delay in coming back to breakfast ; and after that, Lucy—who would previously have given out that she was going to London for a few weeks' absence, and therefore required to take up with her the maid, the footman, and considerable luggage—would drive to the station to catch that precious express which was the pride and solace of the neighbour-

hood. Eustace, of course, would have to leave Yaxley, so there would be nothing odd or indecorous in the lady allowing him to take advantage of her carriage and luggage-van down to the station. As for the journey to London, he charged himself with securing the 'engaged' compartment.

The unknown quantity still was Mr. Lidyard. If he blabbed, all was up: if he refused, they must seek for other combinations, as statesmen making ministries express it. So Lucy asked him to luncheon, and after the meal called him up to the Library, where they were soon joined by Eustace. First she begged him to promise silence as to the communication which she was about to make.

‘Certainly,’ he replied, ‘provided only it is touching some matter which is lawful and of good report. But from you, Mrs. Foulis, I cannot anticipate anything else.’

Lucy blushed from top to toe, in dread lest a few minutes might compel him to reconsider his good opinion of her; but, with a desperate effort, she collected herself, and unfolded the story. To their infinite relief, Mr. Lidyard, with his mild unworldliness, saw nothing to object to in the notion. All that he had seen or heard of Mr. Brandreth had impressed him with a conviction of his worth; and why should not Mrs. Foulis and he seek the occasion of that early celebration which was so dear to

him, and the permission of their Metropolitan, to contract a marriage so true and laudable in the sight of God and the Church? It was, he observed, a much more solemn way of plighting their troth than a fashionable wedding, with all its paraphernalia of worldly pomp, its etiquettes and jealousies, eating, drinking, laughing, crying, speech-making, old shoes, and grubby rice.

In truth, there was a latent and much unappreciated spice of humorous romance in the quiet little man's character. In his heart of hearts, he rejoiced at the thought of the monotony of his daily existence, permanently saddened as it had been by his own bereavement, being so unexpectedly varied by

this summons to act as prime agent in an adventure so interesting and yet so blameless, on behalf of one for whom his silent affection and respect had gone on year by year increasing, as the tale of Lucy's deeds of hidden charity—the days and nights of weary and often dangerous watchings by the squalid, the loathsome, and often the infectious sick-beds of his suffering and dying parishioners—went rolling up in a bright account of good works. Moreover, he had a quite personal and unsuspected reason for rejoicing. It had fallen to him, as curate in charge of the mother church, between Mr. Edlin's death and Mr. Rees's induction, to officiate at the marriage of Augustus Foulis and Lucy Curteis, and

the cold shock which the bridegroom's bearing had given to him still haunted his thoughts. 'It never can be happy,' he then said. It was most unhappy, and he had been the official instrument of that unhappiness. Now, by the blessing of God, he saw himself called upon to preside at what he trusted would be a happy marriage of reparation. No, certainly, when there could be no objection to the proposed arrangements beyond some strained prejudices (as he thought) of conventionality, he would not cut himself off from so strangely vouchsafed a privilege.

He was now fairly on one of his favourite topics, and he ran on. 'Second marriages are, without doubt, not heroic things, and I cannot severely blame the

many pious men who have condemned them, though often, it must be owned, with intemperate language. But crass generalisation is always wrong and always foolish. No one marriage was ever quite like another, any more than one person can be just like another. There are second marriages—if I am right, in speaking of such unions, to profane that sacred word—which are distinctly, without exception, blameworthy in the eyes of God and in those of society—marriages such as those where a widower cannot bring their aunt home to look after his orphans who are her own nephews and nieces without hankering after the possession of that woman, and so, with his eyes open, making her the stepmother and the rival of

her own charges ;—alliances,’ he added, with growing earnestness, ‘which make my gorge rise when I see those opulent self-seekers, with all the world to pick wives out of, and their sisters-in-law—I warrant—willing enough to stop on with them as sisters-in-law, for the sake of the home and the keep, upsetting all established ideas of right and wrong, and shocking good people without remorse, merely to gratify their uncontrolled personal fancy, at what risk they neither think nor care. Again, there are second marriages which are neither one thing nor another. But, besides all these, there are those which are obviously desirable, neither forbidden by divine law, nor repugnant to social decorum, and leading up to some

obvious benefit, and we should therefore declare praiseworthy ; and among them I reckon this present one, as an alliance highly to be commended, and likely to be of much general advantage.'

'I suppose,' interposed Lucy, 'you expect I shall otherwise wax wanton ?'

'Do not, my dear patron, trifle with Scripture, or I shall withdraw all my commendations,' replied the Vicar, somewhat gravely. ' You know what I mean. Your peculiar and great responsibilities, and, if you will pardon the reference, your history, your opportunities, and, on the other side, your peculiar want of opportunities owing to your solitary state, all indicate marriage, if undertaken in the fear of God, as your happiest condition of life. It all depends

upon the choice, and I believe you have made a good choice. If I should be deceived, I trust to ban Mr. Brandreth with bell, book, and candle.'

Thereupon Eustace jumped up, took the Vicar by both hands, nearly shook his arms out of their sockets, and shouted, 'I tell you, Mr. Lidyard, if I ever show myself unworthy of that most dear and excellent creature who has made me so undeservedly the happiest man in the world, that you have my full leave to curse me with bell, book, and candle, to pull my nose, and to kick me down the great stairs of Yaxley, and into the horse-pond. But what about witnesses?' he continued; 'and how will you tie their tongues till we are off?'

'Make yourself quite easy, my dear

sir. I have a pupil who always comes early to church on Wednesdays—he sha’n’t escape out of my sight for half the morning; and I will keep the old clerk bothering over his accounts, which are always in a mess, till I know his breakfast is as cold as a stone; he will then have to run home two miles the other way and make his peace with his shrew of a wife, who will be ready to break his head with the broomstick for spoiling the meal; so he will be as safe as the Bank of England till you are well on your road to town.'

Of course the in-door servants had no more overlooked the warm friendship which had sprung up between their mistress and the pleasant young lawyer

than had the gardener, the bailiff, and the keeper ; and the circumstance gave rise to many interesting conversations at dinner and in the evening. But Mrs. Kershaw had determined that Lucy was to continue to the end of her days a soured celibate, and with Williams the edict of Mrs. Kershaw was that of a supreme tribunal. Bright little Anna, the lady's maid, would occasionally venture to interpose with some such meek remark as 'Really, Mrs. Kershaw, do you see any such great harm ?' and the answer was, 'Of course I do, and so would you if you had sense or delicacy.' On the whole, however, the cook performed a useful service in her disagreeable way by stifling gossip and surmise. When

Williams used to hint that his position with Mrs. Kershaw in the house was difficult, she would always silence him by observing that Mrs. Foulis and Mr. Branderth were a difficulty, and she hoped Williams had not a word to say against *them*. By good luck, no chance tattle spread further than the neighbourhood of the house, for a change of ownership in the village shop had led to many complaints as to the quality of the articles and the punctuality of delivery; so Mrs. Foulis was just giving a trial to a dealer of higher standing in the county town, and the great reciprocal channel of gossip was for the time cut off. Mrs. Rees's and Miss Turner's attendants had no acquaintance at Yaxley,

and the servants at the Vicarage and Dr. Arlett's had neither time nor propensity for scandal-mongering. The verdict of the steward's room, however, had to change for the last two or three days, as the announcement of Mrs. Foulis's visit to London had completely thrown the downstairs party on a false scent. Sounds of an eager conversation had been heard by deaf Mr. Williams, as he passed by the end door of the secluded Library, and on his thickened tympanum they fell as the accents of quarrelling. This story coupled with the unexpected news of the speedy departure of mistress and of visitor, was sufficient to lead to the universal supposition that Mr. Brandreth's visit had

come to an unpleasant and sudden ending. Accordingly, as no effect could be left without a cause, it was quickly and easily surmised that the agreeable gentleman was really in partnership with his father, and had sought out Yaxley with the intention of extorting money for his father and his stepmother, and had been exposed, and his wicked venture frustrated. Eustace, on his side, was puzzled at the sudden change to coldness, if not almost rudeness, in the manner to him of Mr. Williams, with whom he had hitherto been a favourite. Sometimes he feared that the secret had been discovered, and that Williams was working up to giving or taking warning; at other times he comforted

himself with the idea that such impolitic behaviour towards a future master proved the want of any suspicion. In any case, it was impossible to remonstrate; for the old man's neglect of personal service, though highly inconvenient, was quite intangible to one whose cue was to continue in the ostensible character of visitor.

CHAPTER X.

ONLY TWO LETTERS.

BUT the loving pair were not yet out of their perplexities, even after they had secured the services of Mr. Lidyard. As soon as the day was named, there arose upon their horizon the ugly question of announcements—that fruitful source of heartburnings— involving the decision of who the persons might be to whom the marriage was to be notified, how soon, if ever, and in what form. After infinite siftings, casuistry worthy of Escobar, and most ridiculous

vacillation, it was finally settled that only two letters were essential or even desirable—one to the Brandreths, and the other to Featherston. ‘Ought not you also to write to Mr. Musgrave?’ meekly asked Eustace. ‘Old frump!’ Then another difficulty cropped up: was he to write to his father, or Lucy to her daughter? Ultimately it was decided that between conflicting objections the balance lay on the side of the announcement passing between the ladies, as a more familiar style and less compromising details were possible than if the Baronet’s heir had to communicate with the Baronet. It was further settled that the posting of this letter should be so timed as to ensure its reaching Lady

Brandreth on the Friday morning after the marriage. Writing to Featherston was a very different matter, and by no means an easy one. In truth, Lucy felt that she had been culpably neglectful of her oldest friend of late. She knew that she ought to have invited him to Yaxley to meet, and be made known to, Eustace. She ought to have done so when her impulsive civility to the Revising Barrister had landed her in his most embarrassing visit. There were, to be sure, reasons at the time which persuaded her that it would be wise to refrain from the duty. But these excuses of cowardice became continually more weak. She ought still more to have opened her heart to her guardian

when she found herself every day taking more and more interest in her self-introduced visitant. It was useless now to plead that there had been many obstacles, felt or unfelt, some grave, others merely tiresome, which had stood between Lucy and this duty, till it now seemed too late; the black fact was there, that her own sophistry had created a position for her of painful difficulty.

Her troubles on this score had begun with the visit which Featherston paid to Yaxley in company with his cousin, Colonel Mordaunt, on the eve of the day when Meriel's announcement of her ill-starred marriage arrived. Lucy had, of course, no alternative except to send back for him, and, when he reached

Yaxley, to tell him the whole story, as far as she knew it from her daughter's original beguiling letter; and as she went on she could see that though the dear, affectionate old man said nothing, and was as sincerely considerate in his sympathies as even in the far-off days of her great trouble, he felt something in which sorrow and disappointment were blended with a trace even of pique, at having been taken so late into a confidence which he felt he had a claim to have shared all through. It may have been a surface feeling only—it was certainly one which he had not shaped in definite words, and which did not, as he took good care, derogate from his affectionate effusiveness of consolation. Had

it been more pronounced, and led to an explanation, the cloud would probably have quite passed away; as it was, it left him mortified and Lucy uncomfortable, with these last words of Featherston's tingling in her ears: 'If ever I meet that scoundrel Brandreth, or his son, or any of their rascally lot, I'll insult them; and if they ask me why I'll break every bone in their bodies.'

Even when Eustace was only a name to her, this state of things gave Lucy genuine distress. Her sense, indeed, told her that she had nothing then to reproach herself for. A daughter's well-being must be a mother's first concern, and in the matter of Meriel's letter this was the only point important to Mrs. Foulis, and

to which she really turned her thoughts. Now it was certain that on this special matter Featherson's advice would have been without value; so she could only have taken it as a formality, or else with the intention of following it, however misleading it might prove itself to be. In one case she would have affronted her friend, and in the other have wronged her daughter as well as herself. Yet, after all this was granted, the look-out was dismal; for to an affectionate heart there is nothing so distressful as the conflict between reason and affection. Such conflicts are more than usually difficult when one of the parties feels that he has a complete answer, but that the answer involves some imputation on the

sense of the person whom he has not only to answer, but to conciliate. Duty towards her daughter's feelings or interests could not now avail Lucy as any excuse. Her reckoning was with Featherston alone, and a sorry one she felt it likely to be. The practical result of the Baronet's treachery had been to set up in Featherston's mind a perfectly outrageous hatred of the very name of Brandreth in any possible conjunction. Lucy was so well aware of this, that she had never dared so much as announce Eustace's visit to Featherston; and now she had both to declare her marriage with him, and also to construct plausible reasons for her antecedent conduct.

But even on the happy, though very improbable, supposition that Featherston

could have been brought to see that Eustace Brandreth was, for all practical purposes, as unconnected with the Baronet of the same name as if he had been born and brought up in Vermont or Arkansas, Lucy had come to the conviction that a rencontre, however friendly, over her dinner-table would have bristled with difficulties even during those earlier days when her love for Eustace Brandreth was still embryonic, although running through every vein and mingling in all her thoughts like a malady which the doctor says has not yet come out. Featherston was not the man to take a hint readily and in silence, and she shrank from the anticipation of his boisterous old-world jokes and the manifestations of

an affection which she believed to be quasi-paternal, but which must to Eustace appear somewhat singular.

Had the secret of Featherston's earlier life ever been revealed to Mrs. Foulis, her perplexity would have been much greater. The thought had never crossed her mind that he had been in love with her in the days of her budding womanhood, nor that it was only his very scrupulous interpretation of a guardian's responsibilities which had held him back from declaring that love. On and after her marriage with Foulis, a curious revulsion of feeling took possession of Featherston. He loved Lucy more rather than less, for it was a love into which pity entered, and never once did he blame her. How could he,

when, talked over by silly, tuft-hunting Miss Harriett, he had himself consented to the alliance with the plausible aristocrat ? But, somehow, she was unsexed to him. She was still his very dear child, just as a high-spirited, affectionate schoolboy might have been the possible recipient of a man's most exclusive and constant affections ; as a possible wife, however, she no longer existed to him. But, in the meantime, we are leaving Mrs. Foulis in the agonies of composing a most difficult letter.

Lucy, before sitting down to her task, took up the almanack, and computing the days which had elapsed since Featherston had last ridden over to Yaxley, she discovered that so long an absence ha

never been known while both were resident in the country. She felt sure that her worst fears were not exaggerated. Her guardian had heard of Eustace's visit. He was angry to the pitch of silence, and, perhaps, would never forgive her, never again speak to her. She was mistaken, however, in her supposition. True, he was a little angry for her silence about Meriel's letter, but his absence and silence were more due to a cause of which she had not the slightest conception. The fact was, that he had just made his first, but long deserved, experience of gout, and he made certain that Dr. Arlett must have been to Yaxley and reported to Lucy the extraordinary mishap, not knowing that the

doctor's visit to him was on the last morning before a short and hardly earned holiday. So he went on every day expecting a visit, or at least a message, from her, but, getting none, he worked himself up into a gouty fury. His only comfort was to persuade himself that he had discarded Yaxley for ever, and to tell himself, with much internal emphasis, 'If the young woman cares so little for her worn-out old servant in his day of suffering, the old servant will let her follow her own fandangles. Women are Jezebels, —all, even Lucy.'

When the colchicum gave him some comfort, he relented, and resolved to go to Yaxley the next day. So, on the following morning, he very much astonished

his servant by calling for his boots. On the first impact of his still swollen feet with the stiff leather, Lucy became Jezebel again, and the gouty temper resumed its sway. Worse or better, he continued haughty and huffy, and absolutely prohibited his household from holding any communication with Yaxley. ‘Whether she knows it or not, she shall hear it from me.’

With all her disagreeable surmisings, and her total ignorance of the real state of matters, Lucy had to consider not only how to word her letter, but to settle what that letter should be in substance.

Was it not too late for Lucy Foulis to think of introducing Eustace Brandreth as her intended to her old guardian,

and must she not wait till the wife could present her husband to her dearest old friend ?

This course slurred over the present crisis, and adjourned the most vexatious difficulties ; so it was at first the favourite expedient. But a little fidgeting and pen-biting led to the conclusion that, easy as it might be now, it would probably be an affront to, and life-long coolness with, her father's old friend and the playfellow of her own childhood, to whom she owed so much, and whom she loved so dearly. Eustace gave it its death-blow by remarking, 'As he means to break my bones when he meets me, he had better do it while it will not cost you anything in mourning, for crape is very expensive.'

Clearly there was nothing left to her but to plump the fact that she had fallen in with, had fallen in love with, and was going to marry, that Eustace Brandreth whose bones Featherston had so recently promised to break ; and to make the most obstinate old gentleman in the county retract all his prejudices against a man whom he hated solely and simply for Lucy's own sake. Yet she had, by way of excuse for so absurd a request, nothing better to urge than that, in her infatuation, as he would think it, she had fancied this particular man for her husband when she had all the world to choose from, with the certainty (as, in the little secret vanity of her inmost heart, she made sure old Bob, at least,

would think) that there was no one so high, so handsome, so clever, or so young, who would not, provided only he was not burdened with a living wife already, throw himself at her head, on her doing the like at his. This was, of course, not Lucy's estimate of herself, but what she knew from experience her foolish, old, loving guardian would think of her. This, then, was the unlucky standpoint from which she would have to direct all her artillery of pleading, coaxing, entreating, flattering, admonishing, and coercing, to recover the man whom, up till now, she could have sent to the end of the world by lifting up her little finger.

How many sheets of paper were begun and then torn up, how wofully

the blotting-paper was defiled with scribblings, how many furlongs paced up and down the carpet of the long library, are computations more easily imagined than worked out. The mere statement of facts was a task of unusual delicacy, and after they had been scheduled, the not less delicate work supervened of saucing them with diffusive explanation and effusive tenderness, crossing dry details and streaking every paragraph; while the entire story had to be ballasted with vehement and repeated injunctions to maintain absolute secrecy. After all, in naming the day to Featherston, she forgot to specify the hour or to refer to having obtained a special license.

The topics took their places, not in

their hard chronological order, but as each seemed most likely to tell upon Featherston's susceptible heart, and the whole composition went on meandering like Lucy's conversation in her brightest and most witty mood. At every turn, she implored and prayed him, above all things, to come over with the least delay, and make the acquaintance, the friendship, of the best of men—son of Sir Miles, indeed, but the direct reverse of Sir Miles in every conceivable respect. He was, above all things, himself most desirous to be known to one for whom, from general report, he had so true and deep a respect. Let Featherston only ask Mordaunt, and he would learn what society thought of Eustace. All this

could not, under the most favourable circumstances, have been embodied in the concise phraseology of a lawyer's bill; while the belief on Lucy's side that she had put herself in the wrong, made her dread passing over any possible argument which could help to right her. She had, she felt sure, to bring Featherston's eyes back to their own genuine focus, and to place herself on her own old pedestal, before she could invite him to judge her in her new attitude.

The task at last was ended, when Eustace observed, 'Of course you are going to keep a copy.'

'O dear!' sighed Lucy. So he good-naturedly undertook to take it. But as he made her sit by him, and as at every

turn she was asked to decipher some gracefully illegible word, she began to think that the relief of his clerkship was more formal than real.

At the very last, tired and confused, Lucy folded it up, placed it in its envelope, and sealed it with that old family seal, with the big Curteis crest, which it was the Squiress's rule, in despite of heraldry, to apply to every letter of superior importance. There was nothing left but to direct it. But at this last and most mechanical stage her sorely-tried wits fairly collapsed, and when she ought to have superscribed—

‘ROBERT FEATHERSTON, Esq.,

‘Warbury Lodge,

‘Hinderton,’

she wrote instead,

‘ROBERT FEATHERSTON, Esq.,

‘Hinderton Lodge,

‘Warbury.’

Now Warbury, as all Europe and America know, is a rich, bustling, dirty manufacturing town in Lancashire, where the name and fame of Featherston are utterly unknown. So its intelligent postmaster, after sending the letter travelling over every street of the place, was forced to open it, and there only learned that it was written by one Lucy, dating from ‘you know where,’ to ‘My dear old Magistrate.’ Mrs. Foulis, be it explained, had kept up with Featherston, in deference to his affectionate conservatism of

nature, a foolish style of writing first adopted towards her guardian when she was painfully working out round-text letters in her copy-book, under Miss Harriett's snappish superintendence. She asked herself whether in so important a communication she ought not to adopt a more sensible style and a distinct signature, but her instinct answered her that her doing so would be taken by Featherston to imply cooled affections. So the letter was perforce sent to the Dead Letter Office, in St. Martin's-le-Grand. The acute official into whose hands it came observed that it bore the post-mark of Hinderton, while reference to the County Directory revealed the fact that at Warbury Lodge, nigh that

town, dwelt Robert Featherston, a magistrate. The clue was thus complete, and the letter was re-sealed and sent again on its travels, with 'Try Hinderton' scrawled upon it. Safely it did arrive at last, but not till the wedding morning itself. So Lucy had had to dress herself for the early service in a fever of helpless remorse, penetrated with the idea that she had really alienated her dear guardian, and that his previous silence, and then absence, were the just rebuke and punishment of her heinous misdeeds. With this exception, all the arrangements prospered. The special license had been obtained, and the pupil and the clerk went to church; so that Lucy and Eustace were united, as pre-arranged, upon the

selected Wednesday, walked home by the diggings, and ate an early breakfast, so as to be in time for the London express.

CHAPTER XI.

CLEARED UP.

AFTER all, the loving pair nearly lost their train. Lucy was full dressed and ready to start, when she recollect ed that she had left her keys in the Library, and ran there to fetch them. The room was in much confusion, and as she was leaning over the table, fishing for them among a heap of papers, and Eustace stood first on one foot and then on the other, as the man does who has *Bradshaw* on

the brain, they heard a noise behind them. The door burst tumultuously open, and in hobbled dear Bob Featherston, helping himself along with a stick, his face red with excitement and the winter air, followed by Mr. Musgrave, as grim as the executioner in a serious opera. ‘Try Hinderton’ had found Featherston that morning just as he was shaving, and on reading the epistle he pulled himself up, banned any suggestion of breakfast, and ordered his groom to bring round the waggonette. Half shaved, unwashed, and quite untidy, he scrambled in with much pain and difficulty, for the gout was still about him, and screamed to the lad to drive with the utmost expedition to Mr. Musgrave’s office. Till he found himself

safely there, anger and surprise had frozen his thoughts not less than his words, but once on a wooden chair by the fire, he unthawed, like Munchausen's horn, with a cataract of complaint. The wrong that had been done to himself, deeply as he felt it, was subordinate in his expostulations to his well-founded solicitude for Lucy's happiness, firmly convinced as he was that young Brandreth must be the counterpart of old Brandreth, and that, by some terrible hereditary doom, the mother had fallen victim to the wiles of the son, even as the daughter had to those of the father.

Musgrave was, both by profession and temperament, cautious and wary, and nothing had ever occurred to give him a good opinion of Lucy's judgment, but much

to set him against her ; and while he had heard many things of Sir Miles, and all of them evil, the son's character was quite unknown to him ; so he capped Featherston's alarms with fresh and more soundly-founded apprehensions of his own. They agreed that it was their duty, without a moment's delay, to drive to Yaxley and join in an earnest appeal to the lady to suspend proceedings until titles had been examined and settlements drafted. At the same time they resolved to speak in terms which should convey a politely sharp rebuke for so unwarrantable a neglect of decent and usual confidence. It was decided that Featherston should be spokesman, and Musgrave coached him in his lesson. But when they found themselves in the Library

at Yaxley, and the flustered old Squire was beginning his harangue, a courteous 'Are you addressing my wife or myself?' from Eustace, soon led to the revelation that any plea for delay had, through the Archbishop of Canterbury, become an anachronism. So nothing was left for the guardian but to vent his thoroughly chaotic feelings in a mingled skein of expostulation and prediction, full of innuendoes about 'the gentleman there,' which would have been pathetic had it not been almost grotesque. Mrs. Brandreth let the alarum run down, and then, touching Featherston's forehead with her lips, gently whispered, in the old, soft voice, 'Dear, dear old darling guardian! and have you been ill, and I never knew

of it, and you, naughty old love, never would let me know ?'

Demosthenes never won a more complete victory of eloquence, although his successes involved a much larger expenditure of words. Musgrave inwardly cursed his weakness for having given place to the soft old dolt, who had so thoroughly spoilt the conversation on which he had relied for righting or else breaking his professional connexion with the wayward dame.

Still, Lucy felt desperately awkward, and was proportionately conscious of the duty of seeming at her ease ; so, with an effort, she exclaimed, ' Poor, dear Merrie ! I hope she won't hate us for keeping her out of her inheritance ; for, after all, it will

go to her just as soon, whether I am married or single.'

'Her inheritance!' jerked out Featherston, looking sideways at Musgrave to see that he did not go astray in his law. 'I hope she'll get none from you, little as you deserve the luck.'

'Get no inheritance from me! What do you mean, my dear guardian? Isn't it strictly tied up upon her, as you yourself told me when I sent for you just at that dreadful time to ask the question? You know how I asked it, to shape my life upon your answer; and you know how I have acted on that answer of yours ever since.'

'Go to the little 'un. Please Heaven, the boy'll come and settle Merrie's hash for her.'

Angry as Featherston was, these words

came from his heart ; for, in truth, Lucy's sudden revelation to him of his old stupidity and carelessness fell like a thunderbolt.

‘ What boy ? What can this have to do with poor Merrie's succession ? She has not done what she ought by me, but she *is* my child ; and I have never forgotten that the property is strictly tied up, and that if I would—which God knows I don't—I could not deprive her of her inheritance.’

‘ Bless the woman, is she daft ?’ yelled out Featherston ; and then, as if suddenly recollecting that a gentleman owed social duties of politeness to a lady, even if she had been a few years previously his ward, and still more acutely realising that her blunder was due to his own old unpardon-

able trifling with her question, just from a stupid pique about that Swettenham, he continued, in a slow and measured key, and with a self-possessed dignity which he very seldom assumed, still eyeing Musgrave as if his company brought peace and safety, ‘ Strictly tied up ? Yes, to your eldest son—if you have any sons ; failing sons, and only failing sons, then to your eldest daughter. Does Mr. Brandreth, then, learned in the law as he is, consider his stepmother as so unquestionably your successor ? Ain’t I right, Mr. Musgrave ?’

‘ Most strictly so,’ said the family adviser, with the tone and manner of an undertaker ; ‘ but you have forgotten the husband’s life interest.’

The effect upon Mrs. Brandreth of

this strange revelation, was, in the most literal meaning of the phrase, crushing. Swettenham's dry-as-dust exposition of her father's will had run off her young memory like water off a duck's back, and, in the first wretched years of her girlish widowhood, she had, as she fancied, been told by one whose word was then to her infallible, that the daughter's succession was irrefragable and inalienable. The general belief of all around her had confirmed her in her error; Meriel had traded on the supposition; and now Eustace and she had, like two big boobies, innocently courted and wedded without ascertaining their legal rights and expectations.

These few words of her guardian awakened her torpid memory, and with-

out fully grasping the complications of the situation, she appreciated the main fact. Even Swettenham's long harangue came back to her like the distant echo of far-off chimes. She could only squeeze Featherston's hand, bow to Musgrave, and rush into the carriage, Eustace following her with a solemn mien of assumed deference. Of course, no servant was present during the interview, which took place, moreover, in the safe seclusion of the Library; and as the gentlemen departed in silence, no one in the house was the wiser for their intervention, only that the lawyer's unwonted appearance at the instant of the visitor's departure confirmed the idea of Eustace's exposure and downfall.

As Lucy was stepping into the carriage, she handed a scrap of paper to Williams, the butler, saying, 'There are the directions for letters till you hear again.' Mr. Williams knew well that Mrs. Foulis always stopped at the Grosvenor Hotel, where, in fact, he had frequently accompanied her, and, indeed, he had heard her saying that she was now going there. There was nothing, therefore, about the paper to provoke curiosity, or, indeed, to require it to be consulted till there were letters to be posted. Moreover, Williams's mind was at that time much preoccupied with a long and difficult job of bottling a hogshead of madeira which Mrs. Foulis had ordered some time before at Featherston's

earnest entreaty, and which required to be finished before the cold weather set in. He had been lazy over it, and now the fruits of his negligence were staring him in the face. So he pushed the paper into his pocket, and went to his bottling ; while the coachman, by violent and unwonted whipping of the precious coach-horses, was just able to gallop to the station as the last scrap of luggage was put into the van, and the guard, inwardly fuming at the trouble which fine ladies gave him, was prepared to sound his whistle.

The confusion at the station was so great, and the ill-tempered impatience of the guard—a new servant, not yet educated by Yaxley tips—so emphatic, that

Eustace had to snatch up Lucy, as a nurse might do with a big child at a crossing when a Hansom was bearing down upon them, and pitch her into the carriage with much indifference whether she alighted on her head or her feet. There was a witness of this unceremonious proceeding whom neither of the newly-wedded couple had perceived—a stout woman in rusty black, —no other than Mrs. Rees, who had gone to enjoy the rare treat of greeting a guest of her own due by that train. The expected arrival had failed, and the old lady was standing upon the platform to blow off her vexation before returning homewards, when her prying eyes descried the woman, who was Mrs. Foulis to her, in Mr. Brandreth's arms. Bursting with the great dis-

covery, she waddled homeward in the joy and pride of having at last established a clear case, on personal evidence, of open, indelicate levity against her avowed and prudish enemy. In her preoccupation she absolutely cannoned against Mr. Lidyard, who was stepping out of a cottage full of a sad tale of rustic folly and too-late repentance which had been poured into his ears.

Without so much as apologising for her rude clumsiness the dame exultingly screamed, ‘Pretty doings in your parish! pretty doings, indeed, Mr. Vicar! I advise you to look after your womankind a little sharper than you do, or there will be scandal, Mr. Lidyard,—there’ll be scandal which you won’t like to hear!’

The good man had been left by the

morning's events in a rather excited and nervous state, and now he was completely taken aback, for the words of Mrs. Rees left no doubt upon his mind that, in some unaccountable manner, and perhaps by the girl's own blabbing, in spite of her assurance, the ill-natured old busybody had got wind of the secret of which he believed he alone, besides the parties implicated, were cognisant ; and which he had determined should never go beyond his own breast.

So he was for once completely thrown off his guard, and blurted out, ' I fear you have too much cause for your reflection ; but you should be forbearing, and consider how much there is to extenuate the fall, grievous as I own it to be. She is so

young, you know, and inexperienced, and through the carelessness of a silly aunt, by whom she was brought up, she is so unaccountably ignorant.'

It was now Mrs. Rees's turn to be surprised, both at Mr. Lidyard so readily catching her meaning, and at the inexplicable line of defence to which he betook himself.

'But,' she rejoined, without stopping to draw breath, 'really, I did not expect this from you, Mr. Lidyard, who are, we all know, no respecter of persons. I grant the ignorance, and I blame the aunt as severely as you can do, but I never found much inexperience at that shop; and I never thought of calling a woman who is rising forty, young.'

‘Jenny Worsfold rising forty?’

‘Jenny Worsfold, man! Why it’s Lucy Foulis. Haven’t I just seen with my own eyes the Honourable Mrs. Foulis allow herself to be jumped up like a baby, and hugged, and pawed, and hustled into a railway carriage by a strange man, who tumbled in after her,—that young dandy, I believe, who has just been stopping in that odd way at Yaxley. There was nobody else in their compartment; that I saw with my own eyes, Mr. Lidyard — only Mrs. Foulis and her beau.’

Lidyard now perceived the situation, and, as his wits returned to him, the necessity of obliterating his imprudence about Jenny Worsfold by startling the old backbiter shone out distinctly as he

quietly answered with a touch of jauntiness not usual in his demeanour, 'Quite right too. I am glad to hear it.'

'Glad to hear it! Glad to hear that your patroness, the woman you are always cramming down our throats as Sarah, and Rebekah, and Rachel, and Susanna and Dorcas, and, and'—and then making a desperate shot at some other scriptural name—'as Delilah, has been so grossly misconducting herself in a public place! Mr. Lidyard! Mr. Lidyard!'

'I said I was glad, and I say still that I am glad. I am always glad to hear that a woman is not ashamed of receiving the attentions of her husband, even in the presence of Mrs. Rees.'

'Woman, husband—who *do* you mean?'

‘I mean, Mrs. Rees, that upon this very morning, empowered to do so by the special license of the Archbishop of Canterbury, I joined in holy wedlock Eustace Brandreth and Lucy Foulis. You saw them proceeding to London to spend their honeymoon, and upon their return they will, I am sure, be much honoured to receive your visit of congratulation.’

For, we believe, the first time in her life Mrs. Rees was absolutely dumfounded. Usually speaking, the crafty lady expected her faithful drudge, Miss Turner, to attend upon her and take her lofty pleasure. This astounding intelligence, however, created an emergency such as was never before recollect ed to have

occurred since her declaration of war against Yaxley. So she turned her back upon the Vicar without so much as the pretence of any good-bye, and hurried off to the spinster's humble lodging, bursting with her big news. The two were long closeted together, and when at last their cabinet broke up the only conclusion which they could reach was one which was laid down with statesmanlike decision by Mrs. Rees: 'Well, we must wait and see.' 'That's very true,' was the response; 'for so many things will be sure to turn up.' The crones would have been much comforted had they been told that they had actually stumbled into the knowledge of the great event before Mrs. Brandreth's

—as we must now call her—own household in her own home of Yaxley.

Williams, once at work in the cellar, and forgetting that it was November, took off his coat, and so caught cold as he loitered in that drafty place. It was natural that he should have imperatively required at dinner to blow his nose, so he pulled out his pocket-handkerchief in a hurry, and with it the paper, which fell on the floor. As he picked it up his eyes fell upon these words :

‘Directions for Letters till further orders.

*‘Mrs. Brandreth’s letters to be sent to
the Grosvenor Hotel.*

‘Mr. Brandreth’s the same.’

‘Lor’!’ he holloaed ; ‘I knew it was coming ; but to think it’s come this way!

No breakfast, nor favours, nor nothing !
Did they go to the Register's Office I
wonder ?'

'More likely going,' snapped Mrs. Kershaw, the cook. 'And not before it is wanted, too, I warrant.'

Williams, a friendly and loyal soul, was really shocked at this coarse imputation upon his mistress's character, but he had not lost hopes of Mrs. Kershaw's savings, and could not risk an open breach ; so he had to content himself with an admonitory, 'Oh, Mrs. Kershaw, how can you ?'

'I mean what I say, and I say what I mean, and I'll not stand your putting me down as you always do, Mr. Williams. Mrs. Foulis may be Mrs. Foulis, or Mrs.

Thimgimbytight, but I'm an honest woman, you know I am, Mr. Williams, in spite of all your sneers and your insolence.'

Williams did not expect such an avalanche of scorn. One more incautious word, and the Kershaw savings might be gone beyond recall, so he contented himself with a half-gasped 'Good gracious!' and broke up the party with cheese half eaten and the scarcely tasted beer still creaming in the tumblers.

Thus did the faithful household of Yaxley observe their lady's wedding-day in fasting and sullen discontent.

CHAPTER XII.

UNMASKED.

S soon as they were settled in the railway carriage, Lucy fell upon her husband's neck in a paroxysm of tears, and sobbed, with much iteration, 'Dear, poor Meriel ! how I have wronged her !'

Eustace let her passion run down, and then answered, in the tenderest tone, and very calmly, 'No, my dearest love, you have not wronged Meriel at all. You have only respected your father's

intentions. If we have no son, the inheritance will still be Meriel's. If we have —please God—a son, it will go where I am sure your father would best have wished it to go. It is clear, by what those men said, that he hoped you would have a son to be his heir, and that he only put in any possible daughter, failing that son, as a *pis aller*. No man of your father's views could have wished such a break of continuity in the Curteis line as two successive females.'

‘You really think so?’

‘I am perfectly certain: and I say more—you are to-day fulfilling your father's wishes as you never did before.’

On this, the excitable woman redoubled her tears, though now they were tears

of joy—tears such as she had never before shed in all her lifetime—and sobbed, ‘I am so happy, then—so relieved. We can live happy now, and not think we have wronged my poor child.’

All things have an end, even crying, and so, when Mrs. Brandreth got calm, she said, ‘Ought not Meriel to know this? It will make such a change in all her prospects.’

‘Certainly, if my worthy father has not ferreted it out already. If he has, though, he’s not likely to tell her. He won’t trust a woman’s tongue, with all the Jews ready to pounce on him.’

‘But, dearest, I told her it was not so in my letter, which she will have only got this morning.’



‘That was very awkward, my love; but you really must not mind writing another letter, and putting the thing straight.’

‘But that would be still more awkward, would it not?’

‘More awkward, most awkward—awkward in every degree of comparison, *Lucia cara mia*, but absolutely and indispensably necessary. Our characters would be irretrievably damaged in the eyes of all the Phlyarium, and Rees and Turner would cut us, if we were to leave our dutiful Meriel for a single day longer under the delusion that she had only to bury you to become Marchioness of Carabas. It is very disagreeable, I know, and I pity you so much for the job; but

the first amusement of our wedding-day, when we find ourselves in town, must be for you to write to Meriel, and explain very prettily how matters really stand.'

'Well, then, you must compose the beastly letter, and I'll copy.'

'*Convener.*'

The letter was accordingly written at the Grosvenor Hotel, and, like the former one, directed to the watering-place on the South Coast of England, whither Sir Miles and his bride had betaken themselves. But the footman, a Yaxley lad unversed in London ways, and much perplexed at suddenly finding himself at the beck of a master, forgot to put, as ordered, upon the after-time epistle a second stamp, and so it was kept back

till the morning mail. On the following day, as the Baronet and Meriel came down to a late breakfast, she saw a letter lying upon the table, and called out,—

‘I declare, here’s Mater’s answer. She has written pretty quickly. I wonder what she says.’

‘Capitulates at discretion. Invites her dear son to her bosom, and gives him free quarters at Yaxley for the rest of his days.’

‘Amen !’ replied Meriel, and then read :

‘*Yaxley, —— of —— 18 —.*

‘**MY DEAREST MERIEL,**

‘It is due to my great, though little appreciated, love for you, and it is also due to the connection now subsisting

between Sir Miles Brandreth and myself, that I should inform you that I am about to be married on Wednesday, the day preceding the one on which you ought to receive this communication. The gentleman whom I am going to marry is Mr. Eustace Brandreth.

‘As my property is strictly tied up upon you, this event can make no difference in yours or in Sir Miles’s future prospects. This is the consideration to which, as far as I can gather from your last letter, you and he attach the most importance.

‘Your most affectionate Mother,

‘LUCY FOULIS.’

She stared, and he stared ; he stared, and she stared. Neither of them had

heard of Eustace's visit to Yaxley, and it had never come into either of their heads to conceive the possibility of an acquaintance between him and Mrs. Foulis. At last Sir Miles broke silence.

'The last sentence in Mater's letter shows her to be a woman of the world. The thing in itself cannot affect our prospects, and with you working on Mater and me on *Filius*, we may do something yet.'

The town at which they were staying was one in which the second post followed quickly upon the first delivery, and at this point their conversation was interrupted by the maid tramping in, and putting another letter into Lady Brandreth's hand.

‘Mater again, I declare! I wonder whether the match is off?’

So again she read:

‘*Grosvenor Hotel,*
‘*London, S.W.,*
‘— of —, 18—.

‘**MY DEAREST MERIEL,**

‘I take the earliest opportunity of correcting a misapprehension which I make no apology for having led you into, as I entertained it myself, and as Mr. Brandreth married me under it. After our marriage, we had an interview with my trustees, Mr. Featherston and Mr. Musgrave, and they have explained to me that the reversion of my property upon you is contingent upon my having no son. In case I have one, it would come to him.

Under either alternative, my husband, supposing him to survive me, will have a life-interest in the property.

‘Your most affectionate Mother,

‘LUCY BRANDRETH.’

Meriel fell upon the nearest chair, gasping for some moments, and then burst into a long, wailing, despairing cry. Who shall attempt to penetrate the thoughts of that wretched woman at this moment? She had already lived long enough with Sir Miles to see through the selfish hypocrisy of his pretended love, and though her feelings were not active enough for hatred, she was already thoroughly indifferent to him; and now all that she had thrown aside, her mother’s love and that delicious home at

Yaxley, had passed away—for ever, probably, passed away—from her. Had she stuck to her mother, very likely that mother never would have married again. She was well aware that her husband had only married her for her expectations, and she dreaded some brutal revenge for his disappointment.

Sir Miles for some minutes leaned in silence against the chimney-piece, and then said, ‘A nice mess, young madam, you have brought me into, with your pretences and your lies, you and your precious Mater! My curse on the old hag, and on your simpering, sniggering fool’s face! But, my fine madam, you’ll have to work to earn your bread. You can’t sing, and you can’t act, and you can’t dance, and you’re

not strong enough to turn a mangle. I think you had better sweep a crossing, and I dare say Mr. and Mrs. Eustace Brandreth will give you a broom, if Mr. Featherston and Mr. Musgrave assure them it's in old Curteis's will to do so, and I'll give you a halfpenny whenever I go by. The crossing by the "Phly" is just now vacant, and there's plenty of errands there to run for the young men —to the opera-dancers ; d'ye understand ? And perhaps you may be taken on at the opera at last, as candle-snuffer.' There the old ribald's rage actually choked him, and he paused, panting, with glaring eyes and burning cheeks, fingering the poker, as if in doubt whether he should not throw it at the head of the terrified woman.

In dread of personal injury, she stammered, ‘Oh, don’t be so violent, Sir Miles ; I suffer equally with you from this cruel deception. And perhaps it may not be so bad ; if there is no son, it will come back all the same.’

‘All the same, my Lady Brandreth ! I am infinitely obliged to you for your consideration. All the same, after I am under the sod, and after Sir Eustace Brandreth has had his enjoyment of it ! It will come back, I dare say, all the same to that venerable dowager, Meriel, Lady Brandreth, with her false teeth, and her false front, and her painted cheeks, and her palsied old head shaking on her shrivelled shoulders. And Meriel, Lady Brandreth, I dare say, will find some fine young fellow to lead her to

the altar, and then put her in her coffin with the least possible delay, for the pickings he expects to get when she lies in the earth by the side of her dearly beloved and ever lamented Sir Miles. Lady Brandreth, I owe you my gratitude for your considerate consolation.'

There are some friends who overwhelm you with their verbose correspondence when you are in prosperity, but leave you unnoticed in the days of adversity. 'Issachar Brothers' did not belong to this unfeeling class. They communicated with Sir Miles on seeing the announcement of Mr. Brandreth's and Mrs. Foulis's marriage; and though the experienced dodger fenced with them awhile, he had at last to confess to the real state of matters, and ere long the

Baronet, under their guidance, had to tread the way which leads into the Bankruptcy Court, which he had for so many years, by so many marvellous escapes, avoided.

Meriel, now thoroughly crushed, wrote to her mother a letter of abject remorse, detailing her wretched situation, not only from her destitution, but from the unfeeling treatment of her husband, who paid off the frustration of his scheme upon his less guilty accomplice—less guilty because she had been more tool than partner of his roguery.

Mrs. Brandreth was fairly overcome, and Eustace was touched. So far as her determination went to help her daughter, he thoroughly sympathised with her benevolence, but he insisted upon arrange-

ments which should protect Meriel alike from Sir Miles and from herself. At last it was settled that the offer should be made to Meriel that, on the conditions of her separating from a husband who was only too anxious to be rid of her so long as she represented no money value, and of her waiving the claim to return to Yaxley, which she had rather importunately urged, she should be allowed a pension of 600*l.* a-year, paid quarterly, to her separate use. The intimation was added, that supposing she conducted herself for a sufficient time to her mother's satisfaction, and in the case of the birth of a son, the borrowing powers which existed might be used in order to secure to her a capital sum, settled on trusts, such as Mrs. Brandreth

might direct, which should represent that income.

In consideration of the disagreeable fact that Sir Miles was her son-in-law, and to buy his consent to Meriel separating from him, Lucy further insisted on letting him have three hundred. Eustace heard the suggestion with little inward pleasure, for his reason told him that it would be certainly ill spent, but filial piety forbade him to dissent ; only he stipulated that the gift should be revocable, and conditional on the Baronet living out of England, and also that the payments should be quarterly. The cringing gratitude with which the wretched old man received the bounty showed how low he had fallen. He assured his ‘dear boy’ that in requesting him to

live abroad, his excellent lady had but fore-stalled his own deliberate intention, and that he had formed plans for earning an honourable subsistence, if not of retrieving his fortunes, and possibly even repurchasing his patrimony ; only the first step was the difficulty, from the want of the smallest sum to start with, and that this most seasonable generosity enabled him to take it. Eustace appreciated his father's ever-green assurance, but was silent.

It is certain that for a short time some of the most villainous sherry with which public-houses of the lower grade were able to poison their customers was supplied by a new Spanish firm of Sant' Onofrio and Brandreth. Then came a smash, and the discovery, due to the

treachery of the Irish Italian, that Sir Miles had made such an unjustifiable use of the names of his son and that son's wife, that the discontinuance of the pension was very seriously threatened. Mercy, however, prevailed over justice at Yaxley. But of the pension the larger part had been, in spite of all Eustace's precautions, pledged to creditors. The broken-down adventurer was just able to save enough to secure what was, according to Spanish notions, a bare subsistence, and crawling off with this to Majorca, died at Palma of a fever caught from causes which would be no mystery to an English physician conversant with sanitary science.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE MIGHTY FALLEN.

T was not to be expected that the death of Sir Miles could very deeply afflict her who had now become Lady Brandreth. But she said to her husband, 'I am sorry that I never once had the opportunity of seeing your father in all my life, just for curiosity's sake.'

'You did better than seeing him,' answered Sir Eustace; 'you kept him

alive by your generosity, when I was, I fear, tempted to be harsh and unfilial.'

"Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy." Poor Meriel! what will she do now, I wonder ?'

Separated as they were, Meriel still felt that being the wife of such a man as Sir Miles Brandreth was an intolerable burden. A better and a braver woman would have asserted her personality, and made the world forget him in remembering her; but such a being as Meriel could only sulk and blink. At length, set free as she was by that fierce outbreak of malarious fever, she resolved, in a fretful, selfish sort of way, to do something to reinstate herself in the world's respect. She had been in-

formed that Lady Foulisville, in her widowhood, had betaken herself to a small lodging in Bath, where she depended upon the grudging services of a succession of slatterns whom a stingy and nagging landlady was always hiring and then discharging. It was a lodging in which a lady's-maid who had saved a little money might ensconce herself, and then very reasonably complain that she was starved by a grasping curmudgeon, and worried to death by the insolence and the dirt of a lot of grimy sluts. Yet the once magnificent Countess felt that she had escaped greater calamities when she reached this squalid asylum.

In fact, by a strange coincidence, the sinking of that punt and the submerg-

ence of the cherished cup in the black Lough had presaged the downfall, with ominous rapidity, of all the Foulisville fortunes. Her scene with Robbins, and the loss of a companion who had been, with all her faults and her treachery, very useful to Lady Foulisville, threw the nervous invalid back with a dangerous relapse, and it was many weeks before she could be moved, and that under the eye of professional nurses, to Eaton Place. All display, all gaiety, during the following season was quite prohibited.

The Earl, crapulous, dyspeptic, objectless, more and more helplessly abandoned himself to drunkenness. At last, one evening, he rolled into the Phlyarium, and there, in spite of the friendly ex-

postulations of Colonel Mordaunt, who offered to accompany him home, he insisted on sitting down at an *écarté*-table, at which he was soon joined by Captain Pringle. The other members present looked at each other—more they could not do. At the moment when an unlucky trump left him loser of a sum which it would have been inconvenient to advance in his brighter days, he fell senseless on the table in a fit from which he never rallied, although he lingered to be carried home, and to die in Eaton Place. Suddenly and irresistibly the crash came, both upon that house and upon Fontarabia. The Countess, in the days of her splendid folly, had, as we know, mortgaged the rever-

sion of her jointure, while of the ready money and extra allowance which her husband bequeathed to her not one shilling could be realised. All that she had to keep her alive was a small annuity purchased by the sale of the trinkets which the mercy of the creditors left in her possession.

The enterprising brewer, who already rented the shooting, and was first mortgagee, foreclosed, and is now sole owner of the Irish property. By his munificence, the once wretched town of Foulisville has become one of the neatest and most comfortable villages in all Ireland ; and as he is a man of enlightened taste, he is working up the remains of the old castle into a worthy mansion of

Ballybanaghermore, at once archæological and comfortable. Of Fontarabia, or Diana's Island, no man speaks, except, in moments of absence, Mr. Ruddock, who has retired to the village inn, having married the housemaid who gave such timely advice about McSwinny's boat. The miller's man, after all, proved faithless to her charms, and the kind butler could not bear to see her in such distress. The 'Foulis Cup' is a very model hostelry, and the proud brewer boasts that he is certain that if the Bishop of Peterborough were to see it, he would say that in providing so respectable a place of refreshment for high and low, he had done more to promote the cause of temperance than if he had staved his vats

in, and stumped the country at the beck of Sir Wilfrid.

With Ruddock only one fault can be found, and that is, a persistent and growing habit of inaccuracy, which has caused the legend of Sir Miles Brandreth and the love-lorn damsel to grow in his mouth to mythical dimensions as he retails it to the tourists, to whom the island and his comfortable quarters are equal attractions. The new owner and his family much affect the Lough, which is now traversed by a fairy-like screw steamer, which his lady, famous as the best amateur steerswoman in the United Kingdom, insisted on naming the *Meriel*; while a tablet, set up at Inis-cormac, on a spot where it does not spoil the landscape, records in a spirited sonnet

the protracted trials of the shipwrecked Baronet and his future wife. Flavoured as these lines are with irony, and intended for the initiated, they would lead an ignorant and prosaic stranger to imagine virtues in the couple with which only poetry could endow them. But the rhythm is smooth, the style epigrammatic, and the idea graceful ; and, after all, Sir Miles Brandreth is not the first adventurer whom a sonnet has raised into a hero. The author is Mr. Fiennes, who happened to revisit that part of Ireland on one of his sketching tours, and being invited to Ballybanaghermore, fell in with, wooed, and won the brewer's pretty second daughter.

The new Lord Foulisville has to earn his own livelihood, and he does so without

complaint. He wrote to his father-in-law at Bradford to ask if there were any opening in his business or elsewhere for a clerk, and compelled the confession that things for the present were not going on as the old gentleman could wish. So the brave young man and his trusty wife retired to America, on the plea of pursuing the study of natural history in the still wild tracks of the great 'lone land,' but really in the expectation of his being chosen Principal of that institution which has been founded at Simcoe, Canada W., in rivalry of Mr. Cornell's stupendous creation in the neighbouring Republic. He pressed his mother to accompany him, but she feared to encounter the Atlantic, and betook herself to Bath, in a vain search after cheap comfort.

Plausibility had always been with Meriel a cardinal virtue, and as she believed that the world looked coldly upon her, she felt an inward summons to retrieve herself. She was now a model of staidness in her deportment, and, indeed, much inclined to be shocked indiscriminately, and to moralise without respect of the society she was in. But the memory of her escapade haunted her like a household goblin. Satisfactorily as the story could be explained to any one who had the patience to listen, it was a long one, and the whole affair, coupled with Sir Miles's own reputation, had thrown a Bohemian hue over her. Now, as if by a special interposition, the way seemed open to her to retrieve herself on the very lines of her

aberration, and by the instrumentality of the one person who could from authority speak up for her. The total wreck of the Foulisville fortunes was the gossip of every club and every dining-table, and in face of so great a calamity society showed itself good-natured, and pitied when it might have moralised. She had also been told that the unhappy dowager, whose health had never been restored since the dreadful night upon the mountains, and upon whom the shock of the ruin had come quite unexpectedly, could not be expected to last more than a few months longer. It would therefore be, she reasoned, a remunerative sacrifice of time if, still so very young, she devoted herself for that short period to earning the reputation of having been the

friend in need, the generous consoler, the guardian angel of her affectionate aunt, the once proud Countess of Foulisville, in this day of her deep distress.

Full of her artful scheme, Meriel went to Bath, and there put up at the 'White Lion.' Ensconced in that well-known hotel, she set to work writing a letter of hardly less importance than her former letters to her mother, and with no Sir Miles to help her. It was ceremoniously directed to Delicia, Countess of Foulisville, and couched in the deferential third person. In it Meriel, Lady Brandreth, begged to recall herself to the recollection of her dear and much-injured relative. She would gladly have paid her respects in person, but she could not be sure how far

her presence would be acceptable. She felt most deeply her conduct in past times to her dear aunt,—more, however, from weakness than from intentional ingratitude, but still most culpable. If her aunt would only forget and forgive, and allow her penitent niece to constitute herself her companion and helpmate, it would be her life's duty to repair the wrong which she had committed. She scarcely knew how to add what she was going to say, but her aunt would understand her meaning when she told her in strict confidence that her dear mother's generosity had made her more than comfortable in her solitary condition.

The offer was one which it required much moral courage in a person brought down like Lady Foulisville to reject. She

was very lonely, and a companion would have been acceptable. She was poor, ailing, and frequently in want of the commonest comforts, which her previous habits of life, her age, and her very feeble health, had made necessaries to her. But she felt compelled to decline the temptation when it came before her in the shape of Meriel Brandreth. Meriel's conduct to her might be, and she felt it was, forgiven; but—although soft-hearted people are very apt to make the mistake—forgiveness is one thing, and companionship another; while, as Lady Foulisville knew, the constant presence of Brandreth's widow could not but bring back recollections which she had neither the strength to face nor to reject. The old, kindly, straightforward Delicia

Driscoll seemed to come to life again, after many years, in that feeble, trembling woman, so prematurely aged. · She answered Meriel very affectionately, but very decidedly, declining the offer, although she felt sure that it had been made from the best and kindest of motives.

Shortly after Meriel's advance, Lady Foulisville received very pressing offers of assistance from Lucy. The communications were most delicately worded, and accompanied by the strongest assurances that when she had written so sharply to her sister-in-law she had been wholly unaware of her dangerous illness, with which she had recently and casually become acquainted—confessed, in fact, by Meriel—and had, therefore, naturally concluded

that Lady Foulisville must have been privy to Meriel's unjustifiable behaviour, while it gave infinite pain to be compelled to add that the tenor of the answer which she received did not clear up the misunderstanding.

The poor, humiliated lady felt on reading these kindly, truthful words that but for Miss Robbins's terrorising, following on her malign counsels, she would have written the explanations which the trust which had been reposed in her by Lucy required from one woman of honour to another, even if she had not been her sister-in-law. But her having been weak, cowardly, and mean, was to her startled conscience no excuse—rather, it made the offence worse. No, Delicia Driscoll could not take favours from, and owe

her bread to, the sister whom she had so grievously wronged. 'As I made my bed,' she thought, 'so must I lie.' So she refused Lucy's assistance as persistently as she had done that of Meriel, though with very different feelings. Her time was drawing near its close. She was a woman much to be pitied, with many good impulses and the germs of some fine qualities, marred and distorted by faults, of which vanity was the chief. She had been early confronted with characters and events which she was not clever enough thoroughly to understand, while just sharp enough to form superficial impressions. She was not brave or true enough to grapple with the difficulties which her husband's temper, extravagance, and in-

temperance were always heaping round her ; and unpopular as she personally was, society did her less than justice for her weak, though well-intended, endeavours for its amusement. Placed in a less showy position, and married to a man whom she could have loved and trusted, she might have led a useful, an honoured, and a happy life. Her list of failures was now complete, and in the cold, squalid solitude of her gloomy lodging, she found that time for looking beyond self which she never could grasp in her giddy days of prosperity. She profited by her misfortunes, and in the months still vouchsafed to her she learned to fix her desires on the land where there is no failure, but life and light and love ineffable.

CHAPTER XIV.

GREAT GRIMSBY AT LAST.

AFTER all, Meriel did not make her journey to Bath in vain. The next room to her at the White Lion was occupied by an hypochondriacal old couple from North Lincolnshire, who had come for the benefit of the waters, and who would not be content without bringing with them their own doctor. An inn staircase is an excellent introducer, and Meriel soon made acquaintance with this gentleman, Mr. Gilderdale, who had arranged, so soon as the present engagement was over, to step into

a respectable old practice which he had just purchased at Great Grimsby, having saved money for the speculation by a long and laborious career at Epworth. This practice carried with it a roomy house, and Mr. Gilderdale had made up his mind that the house needed a mistress to make it cheerful. Mr. Gilderdale, a confirmed bachelor, as his friends at Epworth used to think him, was a simple, old-fashioned man, such as can now be only found undiluted in Lincolnshire, so much of Norfolk as lies outside royal influence, Suffolk, and the eastern parts of Essex, and over considerable portions of Cheshire, Salop, and Herefordshire. He was kind, but stiff, with that independent, middle-class English character which, in the seventeenth century, equally thought

itself conferring a favour on King Charles and on the Lord General by taking the respective parts on one or the other side in the Civil War. In a word, he was intensely aristocratic and he was intensely democratic. He respected the aristocracy (which, in his eyes, included not only baronets, but knights) with his whole heart, but he could not love beings who were to him as the gods of Epicurus (had he even heard of them), removed far above sympathy with, or knowledge of, their fellow-mortals. It was, therefore, nothing short of a revelation to find a real 'My Lady' familiarly accosting him, inquiring after his health, prosing about the health of patients, for whom he cared more than he did for his own, and who never failed to season her talk

with some moral maxims, which, absolutely commonplace as they were, sounded in the ears of the pleased practitioner, when falling from Lady Brandreth, like the words of the Son of Sirach. He declared, as he sipped his evening tea with his worthy patrons, that he could not have fancied that a lady with such high connexions as her ladyship could have been so affable, or could take so real an interest in all which affected the welfare of her fellow-creatures. They chuckled benevolently, and observed that, as Mr. Gilderdale had confided to them that he was on the look-out for a wife, he might as well try his chance with her ladyship. At first he was incredulous, and even shocked at the idea of his addressing one so highly placed and still in

weeds ; but after the conversation had been repeated two or three times, he mustered a desperate courage, and opened his heart to the young widow. To his great surprise, he was readily accepted, but upon one condition, over which there was to be no parleying nor compromise. She was well aware, she said, that in all legal documents she would have to sign herself Meriel Gilderdale, and she knew that when she was to be presented at Court upon her marriage, it must be as Mrs. Gilderdale ; but at all times, and in all places else, she must be, without cavil or equivocation, Lady Brandreth. Mr. Gilderdale was proud of his own name, but he thought that a 'lady' would not be a bad professional investment, so he consented without demur.

Lucy was on this occasion informed of the coming marriage without delay, and it gave her an opportunity of carrying out what had long been a secret desire of her heart. Badly as Meriel had behaved, she was still her child, and she believed that Meriel was as sorry for her misconduct as it was in her nature to be sorry about anything. So long as Sir Miles lived, there had been a material objection to the ostensible reconciliation, involving, as it did, visits, which must either have been extended to him or have given him plausible excuses for complaint and intrigue. If the mother could receive the daughter, the son should have received the father. But now he had gone to his account.

So Lucy wrote, not without inward

amusement, to ‘dearest Merrie,’ to say she hoped she was not too late on this occasion in asking her to bring her intended to Yaxley, and that she trusted the sight of Mr. Gilderdale would induce her to give her assent to a marriage with the first son-in-law whom it would ever have been her good fortune to have seen in the flesh. Meriel jumped at the invitation, which Mr. Gilderdale declared was exceedingly polite.

Samuel Gilderdale duly reached Yaxley, and for some weeks the visit was an endless source of quiet amusement to the courtly Eustace and to Lucy, who could hardly restrain the impetuosity of her spirits over her happy lot. She felt that she was at last living a complete existence. The void of which she had all along been

only half conscious was now filled up, and she appreciated what had been wanting. Now there was no longer any want; love, all compact of sympathy and respect, at last was hers. To come to details, she felt that under Eustace's protection she was on the highway to repairing the intellectual isolation which had weighed so heavily on her. The ungrateful daughter, too, had come home, and could look forward to at least a quiet and prosperous, though homely, life—a life, in short, of as good a quality as Meriel was fit for. In such a mood Lucy was predisposed to enjoy the burlesque of a Gilderdale alliance. Better laugh than cry over the go-down of the once heiress of Yaxley subsiding into the apothecary's wife at Great Grimsby.

Meriel's lover was as respectable as he was priggish, while the self-complacent denseness with which he was always blundering out observations most inappropriate to the history of the family with which he was about to be connected, increased as he got more at his ease with geometrical progression. In vain would Meriel pout, stamp, frown, wriggle, and mutter. In measured, quacking tones would he prose about the excellence of widows who kept their first estate, the infatuation of engagements on short acquaintance, and the perils of men who dared, with grey hairs on their heads, to join themselves to youth and folly. This solemn repertory of platitudes had so completely become part of the good man's nature,

that it would keep coming out, like water running along a leaky pipe, in spite of the incongruity between his language and the time and place of its utterance. Meriel, too, was a sight to have made the most austere of men laugh, and the most stolid of women jest, struggling to be at her ease—light, airy, and irresistible—in the presence of her mother and of Eustace, and swathed in crape and bombazine. At last the time arrived when those whom with a sneer she learned to call ‘the parents’ had to make their decision known.

‘Very odd,’ quoth Lucy, ‘but we know that every Jack has his Jill.’

‘And every Jill her Jack,’ answered Eustace.

There was nothing more to be said ; but Lucy was fierce and inflexible on one point. Heaven and earth might come together, but not one farthing of her money should Meriel see if she dared to commit the atrocious indecency of marrying before her year's mourning was out. The bereaved one sulked and muttered under breath about Mater's ridiculous, old-fashioned prejudices ; but in such cases the contributor of six hundred a-year has the powers of the master of forty legions, and all resistance was a transparent sham, without even the moral support of the bride's beloved, for in a difference of opinion upon a matter of etiquette between their two 'ladyships,' for both of whom he had such unlimited deference, Mr. Gilderdale could

only hold his tongue. So the half-promised settlements were finally made ; and when the twelvemonth and a little over had run out, Mr. Lidyard officiated for the third time at a family marriage from Yaxley.

Meriel was, after all, very happy with her grey-headed husband. Her house at Great Grimsby was of red brick, and built in the year of the battle of Blenheim ; so she painted the outside woodwork white, and the inside olive green, gave Mr. Morris a large order for papers, cut her own hair short, very laboriously compelled it to frizzle, put on a sacque, declared herself artistic, and instituted weekly tea-parties. It is something, after all, to be Lady Paramount, even of Great Grimsby.

CHAPTER XV.

RIGHTED.

ET may be supposed that the credit of the very business-like arrangements carried out by Lucy, both in regard to Meriel and Sir Miles, and then upon her daughter's marriage with Gilderdale, must have been exclusively due to the legal acumen of Eustace ; so we must, in justice to that very quick-witted woman, explain that the suspicion is baseless. The fact is, that Lucy took the earliest opportunity after her return from her wedding trip to invite Mr. Musgrave to Yaxley to luncheon,

or to dine and sleep, as he preferred, alleging her desire to speak to him about important matters. We have seen how justly affronted Mr. Musgrave was at Mrs. Foulis's persistent neglect of his many years' faithful and successful services. On receiving the note he sought his wife in their cosy little drawing-room, and read it to her in a tone of concentrated contempt, adding, 'The woman, after humiliating me for years, and throwing herself away upon the son of that notorious fellow, finds out her mistake, and expects me to trot over like a poodle dog, and pull her out of the mess which she has made for herself. She shall write her commands, and her Majesty's post shall bear my reply to her.'

Mrs. Musgrave was a meek but a

courageous woman, and her husband respected her straightforward honesty. So she simply answered, ‘Then all I can say, Musgrave, is, that after having been in the right these many years, you will at last put yourself in the wrong if you send any such message to an employer who has the right to claim your personal attention. I should despise you if you broke bread at Yaxley, but I never could defend you if you refused to go to Yaxley.’

So, overruled by the court above, the sulky lawyer had no alternative but to sit down and write a note in solemn language, expressing no regret, but only inability, for refusing Mrs. Brandreth’s hospitality, and appointing himself for the following Wednesday, at eleven o’clock.

Musgrave comported himself formally and answered haughtily at the commencement of the interview, but Lucy contrived gradually to lead the conversation into the consideration of her personal position, and compelled the lawyer to put her upon her own defence, a task which was not difficult with a man who was angry, and who looked on the woman before him as a fool. Thus mistress of the situation, she apologised so gracefully, referred with such touching delicacy to those early misfortunes of education, association, and unblessed marriage, which had left her exceptionally unversed in the details of business, but which she knew now she ought to have mastered, and expressed with such evident sincerity her high appre-

ciation and gratitude for his ability, probity, and zeal, so successfully shown in furthering her interests, that the kind heart which really beat under his stern exterior was mollified. On reaching home again, he threw himself into the arm-chair by the fireside of his drawing-room—a luxury in which he never indulged except upon some rare occasion of good humour—and actually confided to Mrs. Musgrave, with many thanks for her sound advice, that he had never before understood Mrs. Brandreth. So near an approach to a compliment Musgrave had on no previous occasion been ever known to lavish on a client; and from that day his communications with Yaxley became confidential, and ultimately ripened into cor-



diality in proportion as his fair client showed herself an apt pupil in the law of real and personal property.

For about two years after Lucy's marriage it seemed probable that Sir Miles's amiable forecast to his crushed wife on the morning of the great disillusioning might come true. At last, however, the arrangements had to be made for the christening of the child, who was thenceforward to be Robert Curteis Brandreth. His first name came from his godfather, Featherston, who had in the meanwhile become Eustace's nearest and dearest friend, and who was at the time much elated at having been selected to propose the candidate when he so unexpectedly walked over the course on a chance vacancy for the county. The other

sponsors were the Lord-Lieutenant and the elderly wife with whom he had comforted himself after his rebuff by Mrs. Foulis ; in fact, they and Featherston were the only relations with whom either of the Brandreths had any acquaintance. Young Lord Foulisville was out of the question, particularly as the child was born to supplant the Earl's own cousin in lands and minerals. Sir Miles had long since quarrelled with his first wife's family, who were not so much as known by sight to Eustace ; and Lucy's uncle, the officer of Militia who had forced her father into his marriage, found it convenient shortly after that event to sail for America, after which he was lost sight of.

The news of the birth of the heir to Yaxley was received with universal

congratulation through all the country which lay within the influence of that house. All persons who were old enough to remember more than his bare name said, according to their temperaments, that it was so lucky, or so happy, or so providential, that Squire Curteis had time and strength, during the sufferings of his last short, sharp illness, to tie up that noble inheritance for his daughter's son.

There were only two dissentients. Miss Turner trotted about and turned up her eyes, croaking posthumous regrets over the wrongs of the long-forgotten Miss Harriett Curteis. Her poor dear friend would have felt it so; she who had always watched with such tender-

ness and wisdom over her charge, and who had been so happy when the marriage with poor Captain Foulis was settled. And people would talk so bad of him when he was gone and could not stand up for himself. He was a rough diamond perhaps, but he had a very kind heart, and oh ! so in love with Lucy Curteis. He was ready to fight every man at a ball who dared ask her to dance. Miss Harriett would turn in her grave if she heard how Captain Foulis's daughter had been disinherited for the son of a briefless barrister and the grandson of a swindler. The ingratititude shown to her poor dear old friend had been shameful, drummed out as she had been, and banished, for having so faithfully and fearlessly done



her duty, and fulfilled the charge her own brother had put upon her with his dying lips. Miss Harriett, she was sure, would have been a living woman now if she had not been hustled out of her home by, she might say, her own child, neglected and left to die in misery ; and she'd have prevented what had happened. It was shocking to think of one so young having been that unnatural to the dear soul, who had been like a mother to her, and brought her up from her cradle like her own child ! For her part, she always had said, and she always would say, that there was more behind it all than people would see, with the facts staring them in the face. Why did that Featherston wait till the poor silly young thing was not herself—as

everyone knew she was off her head when Miss Meriel was born—to spirit away Miss Harriett, just as if she had been forced into a post-chaise in the dead of the night, like those ladies in romances? And who could tell who was put round her at Cheltenham, where very queer doings went on, as everybody knew? Besides, she always had seen, and she wondered folks were so blind they never would see, how odd Mr. Swettenham was, dying just when he did. Not as she could stand up for Swettenham's rudeness and want of common feelings, but, leastways, he was old Mr. Curteis's friend, and knew what he meant. And then for that Musgrave to come in—nobody knew from where, nor what he was. Nobody had got round him;

nobody knew what he thought or did or meant. He never would even go to Yaxley,—the haughty, ill-conditioned old wretch he was. She wondered how much fingerling of her own money from the coal-shop and the iron-shop King Musgrave allowed Madam Eustace Brandreth. A precious picking of it went, she'd warrant, to that old viper, Featherston, and to Musgrave's stuck-up wife. And how much Lidyard fingered anybody could see with half an eye, with church, and parsonage, and schools, and hospital, and all that trumpery.

Mrs. Rees was wiser and more circumspect. She took a simple, statesmanlike view of the situation, relying on general principles, and keeping clear of personal insinuations which might lead to awkward

recrimination. She was utterly at a loss, she said, to justify the proceedings of that over-praised old Squire on any principles of religion or morality. He had exhausted his duties to his Maker and his country, as husband, parent, and citizen, by leaving the world which he was quitting possessed of a daughter. Mrs. Rees could defend, indeed — or rather, she should have demanded it — the Squire endowing that daughter with his worldly goods ; but there her approbation ended, and his subsequent conduct raised in her the strongest feelings of aversion and indignation. It was violating the order of nature, it was transgressing the decrees of Providence, it was rebelling against the law of the Almighty, it was blaspheming the Ten

Commandments, and the Beatitudes, and the Creeds, and the Thirty-nine Articles, to say that that daughter should not have the power of using her own according to her own responsibility, even of wasting Yaxley with riotous living if she pleased. Heaven frowned on the notion of there being any excuse for a man who was only a grandfather to take any steps to prevent his child from performing a mother's part to her children, even if that mother's part were leaving them to die on the dunghill. She would like to know what a man's grandchildren were to him, compared with their parents. God never meant a man to care for his grandchildren more than for the rest of mankind. It was absurd to say a man had

any right to protect the grandchild, even if that grandchild honoured him, and kept within his balance, against that middle generation who were the child's own parents. She said so, for she knew what principles were, and she meant to stick to principles even when they were troublesome, although the man of that middle generation might be dragging his father to the grave and sending his son to the workhouse by his debaucheries. Every generation was meant to cut the one above it off with a wall of brass. This was a general principle, and not to be interfered with to meet particular cases. Then, supposing the grandchildren were the black sheep, and their father the respectable Christian, how could principles

stand it? They might spit on their grandsire, and kick their father; or, in the other case, what principle was there that would be strong enough to prevent their father or their mother, either or both, from turning them out-of-doors, for undutifully and unfilially loving and respecting their grandfather? But in every alternative, Providence had said that grandfathers were only created to stand by and see fair play and no favour for the squabbles on both sides of the next generation and of their children.

The neighbours were so ill-instructed in the principles of political philosophy that they were at first unable to grasp the scope of the lady's criticisms, and when some glimmerings of their meaning dawned upon

those rustic minds, more in pity or in boredom than with any deliberate intention of bringing Mrs. Rees to a saner mind, they parried, rather than grappled with her fantastical assertions. The most common answer which she received was that if her principles had unhappily been the law, Captain Foulis might, during his month of marriage, have smashed up the Curteis inheritance, and left his poor wife a beggar ; and they were told, in reply, that perhaps it would have been better if he had been able to do so, rather than that so monstrous a perversion of the laws of creation should have taken place as the Brandreth baby profiting by old Curteis's will.

At last Lidyard had the temerity to suggest that it seemed to him that a father,

dence. The Vicar beat as hasty a retreat as he could, and the neighbourhood instinctively took the hint not to add fuel to the flame by noticing the rhodomontades of one who was generally supposed to have a twist in her reasoning powers.

At last, on the Sunday afternoon but one after her rencontre with the Vicar, Mrs. Rees rushed full cry at Dr. Arlett as he was walking home from church with wife and family, chewing the cud of the sermon by Mr. Lidyard, which had struck him as peculiarly sensible and well reasoned. In it the preacher had drawn the lesson of the folly of purposeless change from the divine anathema pronounced upon the man who removed his neighbour's landmark, showing that the prohibition had a moral

no less than a purely legal application. Serenity was not the most apparent of Dr. Arlett's virtues, and he was unconventional enough to lose what little temper he might have then possessed at one, lady though as she was, whom he always detested, thus rudely interrupting his engrossing thoughts. So he turned round upon the old gossip, and called her, without circumlocution, a mischievous, meddlesome chatterbox, who was ready for any fandangle of her own to destroy what thousands of wise heads could never in hundreds of years set up again.

'That's all very fine of you, Dr. Arlett, whom everybody knows to be first toady of the grand people up there. Much you think of us, poor inferior creatures. We're

the dirt of the earth under your feet. But I tell you what, Dr. Arlett, the people won't stand this insolence and this tyranny much longer; they'll show what they're made of. And when England is really roused, and a policeman or two is shot, and a prison or two blown up, as I have been told they did in America when they wanted to put down the Mormons, your spick-and-span new member of Parliament there, who owes his bread to the fancy of Foulis's widow, and has to pay for every guinea with a kiss, will have to think a bit more than he now cares what he's voting for.'

‘What is she saying?’ inquired Mrs. Arlett, rather terrified, as her flagging attention was arrested by the vehement

gestures and strident scream of the infuriated vixen.

‘She is talking, my dear, of killing the policemen and wrecking the prisons.’

‘Good gracious!’ gasped the kindly lady, whose store of available historical references was mainly confined to a well-thumbed set of the *Waverley Novels*, ‘what can have put her on such horrid thoughts? She must be in the thick of the *Heart of Midlothian*.’

‘Never mind her,’ chimed in the Vicar, who joined the couple as the fuming dame bounced off. ‘She really does not know what she is saying from one day to the other. The fact is that she likes to be topsawyer, and can’t abide being left so many years in opposition. If the gracious lady

up there were to send for her, I'll be bound she would kiss her hand in gratitude, and declare as vehemently as she now declaims, that she never really meant anything. It was all said to storm the fortress ; and once inside of it, Mrs. Rees would forget and forgive all round, and perhaps write apologies to the persons she had most insulted.'

Dr. Arlett shook his head, and replied, 'It is very charitable in you, my dear Mr. Lidyard, to say all this ; but, in being so charitable to Mrs. Rees, you are rather uncharitable to all of us whom she has been rubbing up the wrong way by her unbridled tongue. The scars of unjust accusations are not washed away by rose-water, and the world treasures the injurious imputation which its author might

be too glad, if he could, to obliterate at the sacrifice of his too little prized consistency. When a man, or a woman either, has caricatured and misrepresented me, and then comes smiling to say that she or he never really meant all those unpleasant reflections, which were only risked in order to filch from me some stool of advantage, I am apt to think, in the pride of my heart, that this confession only makes matters worse by stripping the injury to myself of even the colourable excuse of sincerity on the part of my adversary.'

The christening of the young heir, partly by accident and partly by arrangement, fell on the third anniversary of the day when Eustace and Lucy talked non-

sense about Adam and Eve in the old summer-house. The weather was very fine for the season, and an out-door fête was adventured without anyone being the worse for the indiscretion. Friends and neighbours, rich and poor, were all bidden, and all entertained with a hospitality, a tact, and a heartiness which more than wiped away any residue of sore feelings which might have survived from the recollections of the hasty and all but clandestine wedding. Lidyard, after all, proved a true prophet, for even Mrs. Rees and Miss Turner were for the moment mollified, as Lucy, following the happy promptings of a sudden inspiration, had sent to each a beautiful silk gown, with a charming note expressing the hope that nothing would



deprive her on so happy an occasion of the company of so old a friend.

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‘I agree,’ replied the man of law, with a solemn inclination of his wise head; ‘but she did not know the good she was doing.’

FINIS.

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